Educating for Love of Wisdom: John Dewey and Simone Weil

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Abstract

The writings of John Dewey (1859-1952) and Simone Weil (1909-1943) were analyzed with a view to answering 3 main questions: What is wisdom? How is wisdom connected to experience? How does one educate for a love of wisdom? Using a dialectical method whereby Dewey (a pragmatist) was critiqued by Weil (a Christian Platonist) and vice versa, commonalities and differences were identified and clarified.

For both, wisdom involved the application of thought to specific, concrete problems in order to secure a better way of life. For Weil, wisdom was centered on a love of truth that involved a certain way of applying one's attention to a concrete or theoretical problem. Weil believed that nature was subject to a divine wisdom and that a truly democratic society had supernatural roots. Dewey believed that any attempt to move beyond nature would stunt the growth of wisdom. For him, wisdom could be nourished only by natural streams–even if some of them were given a divine designation.

For both, wisdom emerged through the discipline of work understood as intelligent activity, a coherent relationship between thinking and acting. Although Weil and Dewey differed on how they distinguished these 2 activities, they both advocated a type of education which involved practical experience and confronted concrete problems. Whereas Dewey viewed each problem optimistically with the hope of solving it, Weil saw wisdom in contemplating insoluble contradictions. For both, educating for a love of wisdom meant cultivating a student's desire to keep thinking in line with acting–wanting to test ideas in action and striving to make sense of actions observed.

Acknowledgments

I have had the privilege of participating in the Joint Phd Program in Educational Studies run by a consortium of four universities – Brock, Lakehead, Western Ontario, and Windsor. It was a very rich experience. I am grateful to the instructors and fellow students who have encouraged and challenged me in that doctoral program. Special thanks must go to my supervisor, Dr. John Novak, who professes and truly embodies invitational education.

With heartfelt thanks, I dedicate this work to Gerri Link Windhorst.

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CHAPTER ONE: WISDOM, JOHN DEWEY, AND SIMONE WEIL

This dissertation attempts to explicate and compare the ideas of John Dewey and Simone Weil[1] on wisdom. It is a conceptual analysis which proceeds on the assumption that cultivating a love of wisdom in a student is a teacher's highest calling. If this is true –and I believe it is–then two questions immediately come to mind: What is wisdom? How does one educate for a love of wisdom? Enlisting the aid of Dewey and Weil, this dissertation tries to answer these questions.

In 1986 during my seventh year of teaching at the elementary level, I felt it was time for a change and applied for a position at another school. As part of the application process, I was required to write out answers to a few questions. The first one gave me some pause: What is the purpose of education? I reflected on my experiences in the classroom both as a student and as a teacher and on my growing concern with the relationship between technology and education. The first part of my answer I remember clearly: The purpose of education is more than the accumulation of information[2] or the mastery of skills; it is oriented to the attainment of knowledge and wisdom.

Although I didn't have a clear idea of what I meant by "wisdom," I was convinced that an educational institution which ignored such a lofty goal would be "lowering its

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[1] Weil is pronounced "Vay."

[2] Well before the invention of the electronic computer, one university president lamented that educators "spread before their students more undigested information than the human race has ever had before; much more than the human race knows how to use at the present time. They produced a glut of facts to which we are not at this time entitled, for no age is entitled to more facts than it has wisdom to assimilate" (Gannon, 1941, p. 29). Of course, this raises the question that if information needs to be digested before it is assimilated, who should do the digesting on behalf of students if they cannot do it themselves?

sights" and inhibiting its students from striving for excellence. I did not recall hearing the word "wisdom" used in any of my university courses, and I suspected that this omission reflected a prejudice against ancient ideas which had been rendered irrelevant through the achievements of modern technological science. Not only was such a nebulous term difficult to operationalize by the methods of social science; it was imbued with a value orientation which could not be validated within a positivist paradigm unless it had been "neutered" of its normative thrust. Furthermore, "wisdom" evoked images of a religious past that had been "demythologized" and a speculative metaphysics that had been left behind by analytical philosophy long ago. Perhaps we had unconsciously imbibed the Hegelian notion that wisdom would naturally accompany the realization of a universal, homogeneous state ("globalization") and that cultivating a love for wisdom ("philosophy") would no longer be necessary (Grant, 1964/1969, p. 90).

Imagine my surprise when I discovered that at about the same time as I had been thinking about wisdom as a goal for education, a number of researchers were seriously attempting to transform this cardinal virtue into a psychological construct. Many of them were lifespan developmental psychologists interested at looking at wisdom as a possible benefit or ideal end state in aging. Robert Sternberg (1990b) had invited 18 colleagues–mostly drawn from the field of psychology, three of whom held positions in schools of education–to contribute to a volume devoted to assessing the state of research into wisdom. Fifteen years later, Sternberg and Jordan (2005) have reassessed the field.

Interest in wisdom is growing among psychologists and philosophers. According to Ardelt (2005), publications authored by psychologists which focus on wisdom have

doubled every 5 years between 1980 and 2004 (p. xii). Similarly, those who hold positions in academic departments of philosophy have been showing a greater interest in wisdom. If one searches the Philosopher's Index database for citations that contain "wisdom" as the main subject, slightly fewer than 200 entries are listed for the past 60 years. Nothing much appears prior to 1970. Citations since 1990 account for 60% of the total. One third of the output has been published since 2000. Many of the citations are commentaries on conceptions of wisdom formulated by previous philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, or Nietzsche. Others explore wisdom at the crossroads of Western and Eastern philosophy (Guorong, 2002) or at the intersection of philosophy and religion (Clark, 2000). Some Polish philosophers are giving it their attention (Lorenc, 2001; Miś, 2001).

This dissertation focuses on psychological approaches to wisdom rather than spiritual, religious, or philosophical approaches *per se*. Philosophical approaches are reviewed insofar as they address wisdom from a psychological perspective. Why? First, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review everything written on wisdom in the past 2 decades.[3] Second, since Plato's *Republic* (Cornford, 1945) first examined the virtues of the soul, philosophy (the love of wisdom) and psychology (the study of the

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[3] For those interested in consulting a wider selection of books and articles regarding wisdom beyond that reviewed here, see the 49-page bibliography compiled by Trowbridge (2007). Interestingly, it includes only one citation for Dewey and none for Weil.

soul) have been inextricably linked [4]–until about a century ago when psychology emerged from philosophy as a separate discipline in its attempt to use methods of inquiry adapted from the natural sciences. I find it intriguing that researchers trained in a modern paradigm of knowledge are attracted to a word that resonates with ancient conceptions of virtue. Third, I attempt to show that the subjects of this dissertation, John Dewey and Simone Weil, both began their implicit search for wisdom along psychological lines.

In this chapter, I will attempt two things: First, I will map out how psychological research on wisdom has proceeded in the past 20 years with a view to assessing its educational implications. Second, I will argue that a comparison of John Dewey and Simone Weil promises to yield an intriguing psychological perspective on the question of wisdom and how to educate for a love of it.

Wisdom Research

Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development (Sternberg, 1990b) exhibits a coherence and collaboration that is uncommon among edited books: Each contributor refers to the others in ways that make the reader wonder if they had co-ordinated sabbaticals and attended a semester-long seminar together. In the Preface, Sternberg (p. ix) outlines a four-stage model of knowledge development for any field: (a) people become interested in studying a phenomenon; (b) some develop paradigms and attempt to convince others of their worth; (c) "a small number of paradigms become prominent

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[4] In my view, the *Republic* (Cornford, 1945) should be read primarily as a work of psychology. Reading it through the lens of political science can easily obscure the main thrust of this classic work. Plato has Socrates and his friends constructing in their minds an ideal society in order to describe in "large letters" the soul (psyche) of a just person. The political theme supplements the psychological one, but it does not eclipse it.

while others wither on the vine" (p. ix); and (d) the dominant paradigms become problematic, and a search for new paradigms begins or the field becomes dormant. *Wisdom* was published when research development was in the second stage. Fifteen years later we seem to have arrived at the third stage. Of the 11 constructs described in this book, 2 have become significant research ventures while the others seem to have "withered on the vine."

First, this review will look at theories of wisdom that remain relatively undeveloped (i.e., they have either not yet been tested through empirical methods, or they are hypotheses generated by exploratory research and have not been followed up with further testing and refining). Second, it will examine more closely developing theories of wisdom, especially two dominant empirical projects: (a) the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm developed by Paul Baltes and his associates and (b) the Balance Theory of Wisdom developed by Robert Sternberg and his associates. Finally, the educational implications of wisdom research will be assessed, and recent work on wisdom by educators will be briefly reviewed.

Undeveloped Theories

In his most recent review of the research done on wisdom, Sternberg (2003, p. 147-151) follows the same tripartite division that he used to assess the field 13 years earlier (Sternberg, 1990b): philosophical approaches, implicit-theoretical approaches, and explicit-theoretical approaches. [5] The boundaries between these approaches are

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[5] The first two divisions are almost identical to their earlier versions (Sternberg, 1990b), but the third division is qualitatively different. This reflects how the field has matured: Explicit psychological theories of wisdom had not yet been identified in 1990. Baltes and

permeable: When some psychologists investigate past conceptions of wisdom they may study what previous philosophers have written about wisdom even though they label their approach "implicit-theoretical" (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 124). In the same way, implicit-theoretical approaches often form the basis for developing explicit theories: The two dominant projects began this way (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Sternberg, 1990a). My own review will use the same divisions.

Philosophical approaches. In the context of this review, I define a philosophical approach as one in which an author speculates about wisdom or reports on what philosophers or cultural traditions have said about wisdom. In the modern scientific sense of the term, philosophical approaches have a pretheoretical function. They explore possible avenues of inquiry which may or may not be taken up by researchers whose task it is to develop theories and hypotheses that can be verified or falsified empirically.

Since 1995, at least three philosophers of the AngloAmerican analytical tradition have seriously tackled wisdom. Using a linguistic and logical rigour that is the hallmark of analytical philosophy, Ryan (1999) takes apart 12 reasonable-sounding statements about wisdom,[6] rejects 11 of them, and concludes that a wise person "knows, in general, how to live well and ... has a general appreciation of the true value of living well" (p. 135). A philosopher of science argues that wisdom rather than knowledge is the proper

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Staudinger (2000, pp. 123-124) divide the wisdom field in two: implicit and explicit theories.

[6] Ryan (1999) begins by questioning the idea inspired by Socrates that a person is wise if he or she believes she is not wise: "I believe I am not wise and unfortunately, my belief is true. Hence, it is clear that [the above idea] fails to state a sufficient condition for wisdom" (p. 119).

end for academic inquiry: Maxwell (2003, 2004, 2007) criticizes "knowledge-inquiry" (conventional science) and calls for an intellectual revolution, proposing a model of "wisdom-inquiry." His definition of wisdom resonates with Sternberg's balance theory: "Wisdom is the desire, the active endeavour, and the capacity to discover and achieve what is desirable and of value in life, both for oneself and for others" (Maxwell, 2003, p. 9). Kekes (1983, 2004) echoes the ancient notion that wisdom is connected to love of truth and that the criterion of wisdom is not how much one knows but how well one understands the significance of what one knows. Kekes (1995) identifies moral wisdom as the *psychological* capacity "to judge rightly what should be done in particular situations to make life better" (p. 5). Since he firmly believes that psychological studies will fail to yield reliable empirical evidence on wisdom, it is intriguing that psychological theorists and researchers continue to consult his work (Ardelt, 2003; Pasupathi, Staudinger & Baltes, 2001; Sternberg, 2001b).[7]

As a philosopher with an interest in psychology, Robinson (1990) sketches how wisdom was conceived in the history of Western philosophy from its beginnings in ancient Greece until the 20th century. He briefly reviews the predominant ancient schools

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[7] Why is Kekes (1995) pessimistic about psychological studies of wisdom? In his view, the exercise of moral wisdom usually entails an internal struggle with motivation that cannot be seen by others from the outside:

> It looks, therefore, that what is needed for the identification of morally wise actions is autobiographical evidence. Such evidence, however, is rarely available; and what there is of it is notoriously unreliable because of self-deception, the desire to present ourselves in a favorable light, and lack of self-knowledge. Even if these obstacles were overcome in exceptional cases, what would warrant the ascription of moral wisdom is not isolated examples but an enduring pattern of morally wise actions. The availability of reliable evidence for such patterns, however, is even more exceptional. (p. 13)

(Socratic, Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic, Christian) and some modern movements (empiricism, scientism, romanticism). In addition to reviewing the Western tradition of philosophy and psychology, the historical survey by Birren and Svensson (2005) briefly looks at how wisdom was conceived by ancient Middle Eastern and Far Eastern societies. They conclude that a particular concept of wisdom is biased towards the values of a culture in which it emerges. Takahashi and Overton (2005) take this one step further by initially contrasting Western and Eastern views on wisdom: Whereas Western analytical approaches emphasize precision in conceptualization, Eastern holistic approaches maintain an intentional vagueness with respect to defining wisdom. They argue for empirical studies in wisdom which transcend this West-East dichotomy. In a similar vein, Labouvie-Vief (1990) believes that an important task in recovering wisdom will be in finding ways to integrate two modes of discourse that have been split off from each other: *mythos* (embodied holistic thinking that uses a narrative mode prevalent in Homeric Greece and "primitive" societies) and *logos* (analytical reasoning initiated by Socrates that employs abstract logic). Like Lakoff and Johnson (1999), she addresses the problem of the disembodied mind– the unfortunate legacy of Western rationalism.

In surveying how the conception of wisdom has changed from ancient times, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) use "evolutionary hermeneutics" to understand how wisdom had adaptive and survival value for previous generations. They argue that this exercise is important for us today because "to ignore the hard-won insights of the past about issues that are vital for survival is like blinding ourselves on purpose out of false pride" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, p. 25). They maintain that three dimensions of

wisdom can be meaningfully culled from the past for our benefit today: wisdom-as-holistic-cognitive-process, wisdom-as-virtue, and wisdom-as-personal-good.

In summary, although philosophers and psychologists are looking at wisdom with renewed interest, modern philosophical approaches do not directly develop theories of wisdom that can be empirically verified or falsified. Rather, they serve to give direction to those researchers who attempt to construct operational definitions of wisdom that can be tested in the field or in the laboratory.

Implicit-theoretical approaches. Implicit-theoretical approaches attempt to uncover folk conceptions held by people in various walks of life (people's subjective beliefs about wisdom) and/or they analyze selected historical, cultural, or philosophical documents. In a series of studies that eventually included approximately 500 adults from three age cohorts (young, middle aged, senior), Chandler and Holliday (1990) conducted a principal components analysis to yield five descriptors of persons considered wise: They possessed exceptional understanding, communication skills, general competence, interpersonal skills, and social unobtrusiveness. Chandler and Holliday see great value in trying to recover ancient notions of wisdom but caution that such an attempt is fraught with difficulty if it is not done carefully and self-consciously. Looking to the critical theory of Habermas, they urge researchers to move towards a multidimensional account of wisdom, while at the same time cautioning them about the power of the modern scientific-technical paradigm to reduce wisdom to a psychological construct that can be operationalized in ways that may miss the mark.

In reviewing empirical work done on lay persons' beliefs about wisdom and using

a framework of personality development derived from Erikson and others, Orwoll and Perlmutter (1990) define wisdom as an integration of excellent cognitive skills with extraordinary personality development. A wise person uses cognitive skills to understand personal growth issues. Once these issues have been confronted and understood, the wise person experiences personal growth that, in turn, enhances cognitive clarity. Such personal growth, it seems, is a prerequisite for those who are considered wise: they have transcended "personalistic perspectives and embrace collective and universal concerns" (Orwoll &Perlmutter, p. 160).

In his analysis of historical, cultural and philosophical documents, Baltes (Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005) enumerated seven facets of wisdom:

- addresses difficult problems regarding the meaning and conduct of life;
- represents truly outstanding knowledge, judgment, and advice;
- is a perfect integration of knowledge and character, mind and virtue;
- coordinates and promotes individual and societal growth;
- involves balance and moderation;
- includes an awareness of the limits of knowledge and uncertainties of the world;
- is difficult to achieve but is easily recognized. (p. 112)

Explicit-theoretical approaches. Whereas implicit approaches derive theoretical directions from empirical data collected from people or documents, explicit theories develop psychological conceptions of wisdom that may be operationalized. Meacham (1990) challenges the conventional wisdom of lifespan developmental psychology by

suggesting that we lose it as we age. He points to Anne Frank, who exhibited extraordinary wisdom at 13 years of age and to Solomon, who seemed to lose wisdom over the course of his life as his wealth and fame increased. Meacham argues that reasoning ability and interpersonal skills–as much as these may be related to or derived from wisdom–do not get at the essence of wisdom, which he defines as a striving for balance between knowing and doubting. If we are successful at maintaining this balance as we age, he agues, our wisdom will become more profound as a result of life experience, but the essence of wisdom is unchanged. Recent empirical studies suggest that Meacham may be on to something. Wisdom-related knowledge seems to be acquired in adolescence (Pasupathi, et al, 2001; Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003; Richardson & Pasupathi, 2005), with no appreciable gain after age 25 (Staudinger, 1999).

Kramer (1990) identifies wisdom as the integration of cognition and affect. She maintains that thinking and feeling cannot be separated: affect serves "to motivate and sustain cognitive processing" (p. 280).

Echoing Meacham's (1990) concern regarding the limits of knowing and recognizing that wisdom is connected to affective skills and personality development, Kitchener and Brenner (1990) nevertheless focus on the higher order cognitive skills of wise persons. These persons, they argue, are typically in the postformal stage, that is, they function beyond Piaget's stage of formal operations. Wisdom entails knowing how to make a judgment and choosing a course of action in the face of ill-defined problematic situations and profound uncertainty.

Arlin (1990) suggests that wisdom involves more than attempting to solve ill-

defined problems: It looks for problems. Assuming a deep knowledge of a certain domain, wisdom-as-problem-finding combines a sensitivity to anomalies with a willingness to consider change and an eagerness to tackle important questions. Although she has not developed her own conception of wisdom further, Arlin has used the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm to define wise teachers (see below).

Pascual-Leone (1990) connects the growth of wisdom to the development of volition or conation. Drawing on a range of ancient and modern philosophers, he builds a symbolic processing model of the will in which a person moves from the will-to-will (developing the strength to make choices and following through on them) to will-not-to-will (renouncing one's personal choices for the sake of some greater good). As an organismic process, wisdom-as-will-not-to-will incorporates

> dynamic syntheses applying on manifold structures of great brain scope, structures that integrate the analytical/formalized (left hemisphere!) with holistic/experiential (right hemisphere!) knowledge, blending affective, personal, and cognitive domains: syntheses that might simultaneously engage vastly different areas of the cortex. (Pascual-Leone, p. 271)

Drawing on brain research and using a neo-Piagetian framework, Pascual-Leone (2000) argues that the regular practice of meditation can accelerate the development of wisdom in an individual.

With a special nod to Kramer (1990) and Pascual-Leone (1990), Birren and Fisher (1990) sum up the work of their colleagues who contributed to *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development* (Sternberg, 1990b) by defining wisdom as "the *integration of*

the affective, conative, and cognitive aspects of human abilities in response to life's tasks and problems" (Birren & Fisher, p. 326).

Developing Theories

Since 1990, two theories have emerged which dominate psychological research in wisdom: the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm and Sternberg's Balance Theory of Wisdom. Paul Baltes and his colleagues at the Max Planck Institute in Germany were already leading the field by 1990. They have developed a complex theory in the context of research in lifespan development (Baltes, Glück, & Kuntzmann, 2002; Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994; Staudinger, 1999; Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003). A sociologist has recently entered the lifespan development field to challenge this group: Monika Ardelt has constructed an empirically-based conception of wisdom that critiques the Berlin Paradigm (Ardelt, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2004). Finally, Sternberg's balance theory has developed in conjunction with work on intelligence and creativity in the context of educational psychology (Sternberg, 1990a, 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Sternberg & Lubart, 2001). First, we will consider the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm and Ardelt's critique of it. Then we will look at Sternberg's Balance Theory of Wisdom.

The Berlin wisdom paradigm. The core of the Berlin Paradigm was conceived early in their work: Wisdom is "expert knowledge involving good judgment and advice in the domain, fundamental pragmatics of life" (Baltes & Smith, 1990, p. 95). Using a notion derived from the distinction between fluid and crystallized intelligence, Baltes and Staudinger (1993) contrast two processes that normally develop in opposite directions as

the human brain ages: "fluid mechanics" that diminish in speed and flexibility over the adult lifespan; and "crystallized pragmatics" that exhibit learning that has been gained through life experience, a deposit of knowledge which is related to wisdom. One may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, but the old dog may know a thing or two about tracking prey or avoiding skunks that a younger dog has yet to learn. Empirical studies conducted by the group support the view that as we age "fluid mechanics" such as working memory decrease in power. Surprisingly, "crystallized pragmatics" or wisdom-related knowledge stays relatively stable across the adult life span (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 128).

The "crystallized pragmatics" or wisdom-related knowledge has five dimensions or critiera (Smith et al, 1994): (a) rich factual knowledge (knowing that), (b) rich procedural knowledge (knowing how), (c) life-span contextualism (knowing where and when–understanding that facts and procedures are embedded in changing contexts and that timing and appropriateness should govern actions), (d) value relativism (understanding other perspectives in relation to one's own while eschewing absolute relativism), and (e) uncertainty (acknowledging the limits of one's knowledge and the more-than-likely presence of unforeseen contingencies). The first two criteria are considered necessary but not sufficient in attaining wisdom. The last three–life-span contextualism, value relativism, and uncertainty–are believed to be more directly tied to wisdom-related performance.

These five criteria have been tested through a series of studies in which participants were presented with life dilemmas of fictitious characters from three task

domains: life planning, life management, and life review. In the domain of life planning, participants were asked to advise a 15-year-old girl who wanted to get married right away. Participants were asked to think aloud their responses, which were taped and transcribed. Trained to evaluate responses based on the five criteria, a number of raters listened to the tapes, read the transcripts, and scored the responses. Two samples follow:

Low wisdom-related score

A 15-year-old girl wants to get married? No. No way, getting married at age fifteen would be utterly wrong. One has to tell the girl that marriage is not possible. (After further probing) It would be irresponsible to support such an idea. No, this is just a crazy idea.

High wisdom-related score

Well, on the surface, this seems like an easy problem. On average, marriage for 15-year-old girls is not a good thing. But there are situations where the average case does not fit. Perhaps in this instance, special life circumstances are involved, such that the girl has a terminal illness. Or the girl has just lost her parents. And also, this girl may live in another culture or historical period. Perhaps she was raised with a value system different from ours. In addition, one has to talk about adequate ways of talking with the girl and to consider her emotional state. (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 136)

Since advancing age is no guarantee of advances in wisdom, the Berlin group seeks to understand through more empirical work how three clusters of antecedent variables may contribute to or subtract from the growth of wisdom: personal factors (e.g.,

intelligence, mental health, openness to experience), expertise-specific factors (e.g., life experience, giving or receiving mentoring, motivational dispositions), and facilitative experiential contexts (e.g., age, profession, education, historical period; Staudinger, 1999, p. 646).

In addition, they are investigating how selective optimization with compensation (SOC) can help older people remain competent and wise (Baltes & Freund, 2003). Eighty-year-old Arthur Rubinstein maintained his ability to perform piano recitals because he "played fewer pieces (selection), practised these more often (optimization), and used tempo contrasts to hide his loss in mechanical speed (compensation)" (Baltes & Freund, p. 265).

Wisdom in three dimensions. Interpreting data from a sample of 120 elderly men and women first interviewed in the late 1960s, Ardelt (1997) concludes that wisdom was more positively correlated with life satisfaction than with objective circumstances such as wealth or health. Borrowing from Clayton and Birren (1981), she defines wisdom as a personality characteristic– not a knowledge system–which integrates cognitive, reflective, and affective dimensions. Cognition enables one to see the truth of a situation; reflection helps one to transcend one's subjectivity and overcome projections; the affective component includes sympathy, empathy, and compassion for others. Although these dimensions are conceptually distinct, they depend on each other to realize wisdom in a person (Ardelt, 2000a, pp. 361-362).

To operationalize her construct, Ardelt (2003) designed a three-dimensional wisdom scale with 14 items for the cognitive, 12 items for the reflective, and 13 items for

the affective dimension. A sample of 180 older adults (ages 52 to 87, mean age of 71) were tested to assess the validity and reliability of the scale. After more testing and refining, the scale will be used in longitudinal studies "to examine the predictors and the development of wisdom across the life course and to investigate the relationship between wisdom and age" (Ardelt, p. 315).

Ardelt (2004) takes issue with the Berlin group's operationalization of wisdom as being primarily "expert knowledge." She contends that wisdom is not something that one can possess in the same way as one can retain factual or procedural knowledge. Wisdom literature is not wise, people are:

> If it were indeed wisdom per se that could be found in the wisdom literature, two people with similar intellectual capabilities (hardware) who read the same wisdom text (software) would need to grow equally in wisdom. While this might be true for (intellectual or theoretical) knowledge, I doubt that it is true for wisdom. (p. 260)

Since it is based on a weak premise, she argues, the Berlin group's construct of wisdom may be faulty. Asking participants to give advice in the abstract to a fictitious character does not necessarily prove that they are wise in their own lives. We all know people who can advise others well but have difficulty reflecting clearly on their own lives.

Replying on behalf of the Berlin group, Baltes and Kunzmann (2004) acknowledge that studying wise persons is one way to get at wisdom, but they have chosen to study the concept as it is carried in literature or in people, which, they argue is an equally valid approach. They consider wisdom to be an ideal end state and that wise

people are at best only approximations of it. Sternberg (2004) disputes Ardelt's contention "that only people who follow their own advice should be considered wise. Nelson Mandela has done many wise and wonderful things in his life. But he has also made mistakes" (p. 287). Nevertheless, Ardelt's objections have strong empirical support:

> Decades of research on self-regulation as well as research on the therapeutical process have demonstrated that it is much more difficult to obtain insight into one's own life than into the difficulties and problems of others. Thus, we propose that general wisdom is less difficult to attain than personal wisdom ... we expect that wisdom encompassing both the personal and general dimension is very rare. (Staudinger, Dörmer, & Mickler, 2005)

Although Ardelt (2004) may be unfair in calling the Berlin Paradigm "cold cognition," she is pointing to an area that needs to be further developed in both the Berlin and the Sternberg theories (see below): If wisdom is a holistic cognitive process (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990), how do the affective and volitional components connect with cognition? If attaining wisdom is an arduous task, what is there to motivate people to develop it? Why should I "stick out my neck" for the common good?

Sternberg's balance theory of wisdom. Even though he has formulated various conceptual models of wisdom, Sternberg (1990a, 2001, 2003; Sternberg & Lubart, 2001) has kept wisdom in the company of intelligence and creativity. From one angle, he sees wisdom as a form of metacognition motivated by a desire to understand the underlying presuppositions and limitations of knowledge. Using a metaphor of the three branches of

government, Sternberg (1990a, p. 152) distinguishes three intellectual styles among creativity, intelligence, and wisdom respectively as follows: legislative (creating new ways of knowing), executive (applying conventional knowledge), and judicial (understanding how knowledge is constructed). Sternberg (2001) employs an Hegelian dialectic to describe the relationships among them: Wisdom attempts to synthesize or balance the thesis of intelligence with the antithesis of creativity.

In one version of the balance theory of wisdom, Sternberg (1998) saw tacit knowledge (a part of practical intelligence) as the core of wisdom. By definition, tacit knowledge does not need to be expressed in words. A person can know how to be a wonderful parent or teacher without having the ability to articulate and explain to others how it is done; conversely, a person can talk a good line, but be unable to perform. It is not uncommon for a writer to describe the beauty of a hockey play without having the skills necessary to stick-handle on skates; conversely, highly skilled players often can only mumble a few clichés to reporters in postgame interviews. Tacit knowing is having a "feel" for a particular context, to "read" a certain situation correctly before acting. Hence, Sternberg argues, it cannot be taught directly; it can only be learned through practical experience. Good teachers have this kind of tacit knowledge, and their instincts have been honed primarily in the crucible of teaching practice, not in the study of educational texts. Indeed, tacit knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite for understanding and appreciating what is communicated through lectures, discussions, articles, or books.

In the latest version of the theory,[8] Sternberg (2003) has subsumed tacit knowledge under "successful intelligence," which in its earlier form was called the triachic theory of intelligence. The balance theory of wisdom is based on successful intelligence – a theory which seeks to broaden the idea of intelligence beyond IQ. He has maintained the unity of this construct by formulating a triarchic theory that embraces all the environments in which intelligence can be applied without assuming the existence of "multiple intelligences." Although Sternberg distinguishes three kinds of thinking–analytical, creative, and practical–that address the continuum of reasoning from "school smarts" to "street smarts," he maintains a unified model of intelligence.

How does he do this? First, at the base of the triachic theory is a set of problem-solving components or processes that Sternberg (2003) believes underlie all aspects of intelligence for any individual in any culture (p. 44). These processes involve three main components that operate in tandem: metacognitive skills (the understanding and control of one's own thinking), learning skills (the acquisition of knowledge), and thinking skills (knowing how to analyze a problem, knowing how to generate a solution, knowing how to apply a solution in a particular context). Second, these components operate through an experiential dimension where the relative ease or relative difficulty of processing is determined by how familiar or how novel a problem appears to an individual. When components are applied to familiar problems abstracted from their contexts, analytical thinking is employed. (p. 44). Schools emphasize analytical thinking, and IQ tests are good at measuring it. When the components are applied to relatively novel kinds of tasks

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[8] The following description has appeared in *Professing Education* (Windhorst, 2004).

or situations, creative thinking is required (p. 44). Schools usually do not encourage creative thinking as much as analytical thinking, especially when enterprising individuals challenge conventional wisdom. Rarely, it seems, do students grapple with novel problems that require inventiveness and imagination. Third, these problem-solving components operate more or less successfully across a plurality of contexts or environments–the domain of practical intelligence and tacit knowledge. Here the youngster who barely passed grade school surprises former teachers when, as a grown-up, he or she builds a flourishing business from the ground up. When confronted by a strange and challenging environment, practical thinking is invoked when the components are applied by adapting to the new context, by shaping it, or by selecting out and moving to another one (p. 44).

Sternberg (2003) views intelligence and creativity as necessary but not sufficient components of wisdom. Successful intelligence–"the ability to achieve success in life in terms of one's personal standards, within one's sociocultural context" (p. 42)–is the basis for his theory of wisdom. Wisdom seems to grow out of practical thinking in balancing the three responses to an environment: Should one adapt to this environment, or shape it, or select another one? Yet wisdom transcends successful practical thinking in that it seeks the common good beyond one's own immediate interests:

> Wisdom is the application of intelligence, creativity, and knowledge for a common good by balancing one's own interests, other people's interests, and higher level interests (e.g. organizational, community, cultural), through the mediation of values, over the short and long terms, in order to adapt to, shape, and

select environments. (R. J. Sternberg, personal communication, December 8, 2004)

Educational Implications

This next section will briefly examine how Arlin (1999) and Sternberg (PACE Center, 2003a, 2003b) have translated the results of wisdom research in educational terms. It will also review two more recent works by educators who look at wisdom from an explicitly religious (Blomberg, 2007) or spiritual perspective (Miller, 2006).

Wise teachers. Arlin (1999) has applied the Berlin group's five criteria of wisdom-related knowledge to the teaching profession:

> Wise teachers possess: a) rich factual knowledge about teaching and about their subject matter; b) rich procedural knowledge about teaching strategies and the practical knowledge about when and how to use them; c) a sense of the context of instruction and the context in which students are being instructed; d) an awareness of the relativism associated with variations of values and priorities of both their peers and their students; e) an uncertainty of the effects of specific teaching decisions coupled with a willingness to take risks and to try a variety of ways to actively participate with the students in the learning process. (p. 13)

Wise-thinking curriculum. Ardelt (2000b) draws a sharp distinction between intellectual knowledge and wisdom-related knowledge and argues that educational programs for older people should focus more on wisdom. Sternberg (2001b, 2003) maintains that wisdom should be an educational goal at all levels. His associates have developed an eighth-grade history curriculum that applies his balance theory in actual

classrooms. It was tested with a number of middle schools in Connecticut. I interviewed two of the researchers who had developed the curriculum (Windhorst, 2004), examined the course material (PACE Center, 2003a, 2003b), and talked over the phone with one of the history teachers who had implemented it for part of a school year. Using primary source materials and co-operative discussion groups, students pondered dilemmas faced by Americans in the past and considered the common good by balancing the interests of the parties involved. For example, in assessing what happened in the Boston Massacre of 1770, students read and evaluated three eyewitness accounts of the event: one by a British officer, another by a Boston shoemaker, and the third by a Boston newspaper of the day. As a former eighth-grade teacher with an interest in educating for wisdom, I felt the curriculum was rich, engaging, and faithful to Sternberg's balance theory. As a Canadian, I was sensitive to how this curriculum portrayed the United Empire Loyalists who did not side with their anti-British neighbours and who eventually became the founders of English-speaking Canada. Learning American history through such a curriculum, an eighth-grade student in Connecticut would not automatically take the side of the American revolutionaries who tarred and feathered these so-called Tories. Respecting opposing positions without prejudice is an essential aim of educating for wisdom, and this curriculum strives to do that.

Educating for Biblical wisdom. Blomberg (2007) writes for those who teach in Christian schools. Guided by a Biblical view of wisdom,[9] *Wisdom and Curriculum* is

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[9] Three books in the Bible are classified as wisdom literature. Proverbs provides much practical advice on how to live well. Ecclesiastes describes one man's search for happiness and the good life. The refrain that echoes throughout this book sounds like the

nevertheless anchored in the messy world of practice. He defines wisdom as the realization of value in a double sense–understanding the normative structure of God's good creation and acting in such a way that these norms become more real in a world stained by sin (pp. 85-93). Like Dewey (1929a, p. 5), Blomberg believes that norms or values (or ethical and moral traits) are as much part of the natural world as "bare facts." Indeed, values and facts cannot be separated in lived experience. However, unlike Dewey, Blomberg believes that these norms or values have supernatural roots.

Blomberg's book can be read as a conversation about wisdom and how to teach for it. (Indeed, 4 of the 11 chapters are composed as dialogues.) Unlike Sternberg's associates who laid out detailed lesson plans (see above), Blomberg gives no recipes, prescriptions, or formulas by which teachers can instruct for wisdom in Christian schools. His final chapter on play, problem-posing, and purposeful response comes close, but even here, in fine Deweyan fashion, he invites teachers to use his ideas as guidelines or questions for designing their own curriculum. The Ontario of Alliance of Christian Schools (2006) has developed a number of primary science and social studies units in response to Blomberg's vision of wisdom.

Like Sternberg, Blomberg believes that schools can begin to teach for wisdom only if they incorporate more learning activities that demand creative thinking and practical reasoning. Blomberg (2007) gives the example of Bob Clifford, a leading

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anguished cry of a modern existentialist: "Everything is meaningless!" Job explores the problem of suffering–what does it mean when bad things happen to good people who follow religiously the precepts of Proverbs? For a clear articulation of the Biblical worldview out of which Blomberg writes, see Wolters (2005).

engineering entrepreneur, who failed at school yet succeeded in the "real" world where practical thinking is often rewarded. From my own experience comes an anecdote that echoes this. A boy was barely passing grade 8 in a Christian elementary school. The principal told his parents that based on the boy's poor academic performance, he would never amount to much. Despite this dire prediction, the parents saw something in their son which the principal missed. They had seen him work in the family business (wholesale florists), and it did not surprise them when he eventually took over management of the firm. When he hired me on as vacation relief in the summer, he taught me his sales route by putting me in the driver's seat right away. I was forced to pay attention to the route by experiencing it first-hand, not second-hand in the passenger's seat, or third-hand through written directions. This boy had grown into a man who seemed wiser than his former principal.

Educating for timeless learning. Miller (2006) is a teacher educator who addresses wisdom from a holistic perspective. *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion* invites teachers at any grade level to create conditions in their classrooms for what he calls "timeless learning." If an educator is looking for ways to use a theoretical definition of wisdom developed by an analytical philosopher or ways to apply a psychological construct of wisdom in the classroom, Miller will disappoint. In fact, it seems that wisdom is not really a concept for Miller, since he neglects to define it and rarely refers to it. Is he reflecting the Eastern approach to wisdom which, as Takahashi and Overton (2005) suggest, is intentionally vague? Instead, he draws from a wide variety of sources (including representatives of various spiritual and religious traditions) to explicate

timeless learning from which he believes wisdom will emerge. Timeless learning seeks to develop teachers who are less harried by lock-step curricula and standardized tests, can become more present for their students in the moment, and can develop in themselves and in their students the types of things that escape immediate assessment but have a lifelong impact: wisdom, compassion, joy, awe, wonder, wholeness, and a sense of purpose. Like Pascual-Leone (2000), Miller believes that the regular practice of meditation in the classroom can help to cultivate wisdom and offers his readers various ways on how this can be done.

Why Compare John Dewey and Simone Weil?

In one of his earlier articles on wisdom, Sternberg (1990a) describes the wise person has having a judicial intellectual style, that is, he or she seeks "to understand why and what it means that people think what they think, say what they say, and do what they do" (p. 154). I think it would be more accurate to call such a person a lover of wisdom–a philosopher. In seeking to understand what the wisdom researchers are thinking, saying, and doing, the following questions emerge: What are the theoretical paradigms in which the major research projects on wisdom are embedded? What are the limits of these paradigms? What are the ontological and epistemological presuppositions which form the foundations of their theories? Are these assumptions warranted?

It seems that the two main players in the modern psychology of wisdom–the Berlin paradigm and Sternberg's balance theory–share at the heart of their conceptions a pragmatic orientation. Baltes and his colleagues identify the domain of wisdom to be the "fundamental pragmatics of life." At the base of Sternberg's balance theory is practical

thinking which is invoked when the problem-solving components of intelligence consider how to respond to a precarious environment. At the heart of this practical base, there is tacit knowledge which can only be learned through experience. The terms "pragmatic," "practical," "problem-solving," "responding to an environment," and "learning through experience" bring to mind John Dewey. If it is true that the Berlin and Sternberg groups are tacitly[10] assuming a Deweyan position when they think about wisdom from a psychological point of view, then it might be illuminating to uncover what Dewey's position on wisdom was.

John Dewey's thought is still very current in academic circles. The Philosopher's Index has over 300 citations, and the ERIC database lists more than double that. Yet, there is very little that connects John Dewey with the topic of wisdom in any depth. Two possible exceptions are *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (Garrison, 1997) and *Eros and the Good: Wisdom According to Nature* (Gouinlock, 2004). Like Dewey, both authors eschew transcendent forms of good in considering how what humans believe to be good or goods are in reality discovered or constructed in the warp and woof of the daily joys and struggles of life. Gouinlock borrows much from Dewey's pragmatism in articulating an idea of moral wisdom grounded in nature. Wisdom emerges when the pursuit of desired goods is tempered by a realistic acknowledgement of the ways in which nature can assist or limit this pursuit. Taking a more conservative stance than Dewey, Gouinlock emphasizes the importance of custom

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[10] Except for one brief citation by Birren and Svensson (2005, pp. 12-13), Dewey is nowhere to be found in any of the reference lists compiled by the psychologists that I have cited in this chapter.

and the cultivation of certain virtues such as constancy in maintaining a healthy social order.

Like Kekes (1995), Gouinlock (2004) acknowledges the existence of human cupidity–what Christians would call sinfulness–in a way that Dewey would resist. It is very likely that Dewey would have strongly disagreed with the following assertion: "Even with the best of education, sometimes, not much can be done to develop a talented and virtuous human being. Nature has made some persons impervious to such instruction" (p. 103). In Garrison's (1997) view, Dewey would certainly counter Gouinlock's assertion–no matter how warranted it may seem: A teacher is called to bestow value on such students by using sympathetic moral perception to imagine the possibilities for them in the midst of what might seem like an impossible situation. Recounting a case study of a boy who was on the verge of being placed on a remedial track, Garrison applauds the efforts of one teacher who believed in him and successfully fought a system that was ready to label him as somewhat "impervious" to normal classroom instruction. Even though this boy was 3 or 4 years behind his peers in the ability to read and write, the teacher had perceived a practical intelligence in him that no one else had. The teacher believed that this intelligence and interest in practical things needed to be nurtured in the reading and writing workshops of a regular classroom (pp. 178-202).

Although wisdom and Dewey are addressed by both Garrison (1997) and Gouinlock (2004), neither attempts to elaborate Dewey's concept of wisdom in a direct or systematic way. Gouinlock uses Deweyan pragmatism as a platform from which to develop his own theory of wisdom. Garrison comes much closer to articulating Dewey's

views on wisdom–in fact, he covers some of the same ground as I do in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, he focuses more on uncovering Dewey's philosophy of *eros* than on explicating his view of wisdom.[11]

Granted that a case can be made for proposing a doctoral thesis on John Dewey's concept of wisdom and how he might educate for it, why bring in Simone Weil? John Dewey's position needs to be appraised by someone who holds foundational assumptions that he rejected or found problematic. A comparison of two thinkers who seem so opposed to each other can sometimes pull into bold relief ideas that would otherwise remain hidden. A person often experiences this sort of thing in relationships with different people. With one friend, the humorous side is evoked. With another, being serious seems more "natural." What will Weil evoke from Dewey? What will Dewey bring to light in Weil? In addition, when commonalities surprisingly emerge between thinkers who inhabit radically different ontological and epistemological paradigms, the shared conceptions seem more valid, or at least, more plausible.[12] On a more personal note, Dewey and Weil represent two sides of my own thinking on education. How do I connect my experiential understanding of teaching which resonates so well with Dewey's pragmatism to my fascination with Weil's (1950/1959) assertion that "the Key to a

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[11] Garrison's (1997) thesis is analyzed further in Chapter 6 in conjunction with a closer look at how love can operate in the search for wisdom.

[12] Fishman (2007) found this to be the case in comparing a nontheist (John Dewey) with a theist (Gabriel Marcel) on their views on hope. Similarly, when comparing a pragmatist (Dewey) with someone who was very critical of pragmatism (George Grant), I was astonished to discover that their philosophical conceptions of technology were virtually identical (Windhorst, 1995).

Christian conception of studies is the realisation that prayer consists of attention" (p. 66)?

John Dewey (1859-1952) and Simone Weil (1909-1943) were philosophers in the original sense: In their writings can be found a genuine love for wisdom. Yet, it would be difficult to find two figures in the history of philosophy who would seem more opposed to each other. Weil was a follower of Plato and became a Christian 5 years before she died in relative obscurity at the youthful age of 34. In contrast, Dewey slowly and carefully discarded the Christianity in which he grew up in tandem with eschewing the absolute idealism of Hegel that captivated him as a young man. He established a name for himself by espousing a down-to-earth-yet-thoughtful pragmatism well before he died at the ripe old age of 92. Simone Weil critiqued the foundations of modernity as it came to expression in her native France and wrote a treatise which envisioned a radically different social order (Weil, 1952b). John Dewey embraced the modern spirit and challenged his fellow Americans to build a more democratic society through technological science and educational reform (Westbrook, 1991). She was a religious mystic who believed in a "supernatural physics of the soul." He advocated a "natural piety" that rigorously excluded serious contemplation of anything beyond the natural realm, notwithstanding Kestenbaum's (2002) thesis that Dewey allowed the "transcendent" more room in his thought than is generally believed. If Gouinlock (2004) is correct in asserting that "the aims and possibilities of life are envisioned in very different forms by the pragmatist and the Platonist" (p. 32), then what is the point of comparing Dewey and Weil?

There are at least two references to Simone Weil in educational literature.

Willinsky (1998) appreciates Weil's (1952b) reflections on collectivities and how they can nourish or harm individuals who live inside them. Looking at multicultural education, he uses her ideas as a basis for discussing how educators can help students understand how identities and social categories are constructed.

In his philosophy of education, Walsh (1993) mentions both Weil and Dewey in a chapter entitled "Basing Values on Love of the World" (pp. 105-115). He rank-orders four kinds of value on which to base educational purposes: At the bottom are "possessive values and vocational education" (i.e., getting an education is worthwhile because it increases one's chances at obtaining wealth, status, or power). Next in ascending order are "experiential values." Here education is prized because it provides intellectual challenges and adventures which can expand one's horizons and enrich one's experience. Nevertheless, Walsh warns, those who pursue richness of experience for its own sake are in danger of ending up with a world-weariness and a sense of futility. This is because they make the mistake of

> taking parasitic values as host values, while allowing the real host values to languish in subordinate positions. The real host values are, particularly, the trio of truth, respect, and justice, all so many basic acknowledgements of the independent value of objects of experience. Experiential values depend in the end on such acknowledgements. (Walsh, p. 108)

Right above experiential values are "ethical values" or respect for others, followed by the fourth and highest level "ecstatic values" or a love for others, by which Walsh is referring to Weil's contemplative regard for someone or something which is valuable or beautiful

independent of the human bestowal of value onto it, her, or him. Walsh explains that by ecstatic values "the reference is not to unusual 'peak experiences' but to a, perhaps extraordinary, dimension of ordinary daily life. Think also of being *absorbed* by a person, story, scene, etc." (p. 103).

Walsh's position is that ethical values cannot stand by themselves; they need to be nourished by their connection to ecstatic values:

> There is something inherently unstable about a position that makes respect for persons the central virtue in our dealings with others. The ground on which it tries to stand has a way of vanishing. If it is too embarrassed to acknowledge its subsidiary to love, it risks collapsing back into a prudentially motivated regard for others, a subscription to a social contract that promises in return for respect given. (Walsh, 1993, p. 113)

If Walsh places Weil on the top of his scale, where does he place Dewey? While acknowledging that Dewey is "still the educational philosopher most worth reading" (p. 109) and that he integrates ethical and experiential values in a coherent system, Walsh asserts that his philosophy has a basic flaw: Dewey rejected the idea that "the objects of experience can possess value in themselves" (p. 109). If one accepts Walsh's taxonomy of educational values, then Dewey falls back to third place because (again, if we accept Walsh's assertion that ethical values are dependent on ecstatic values) his ethical theory has no firm ground on which to stand.

Walsh certainly puts Weil and Dewey in bold relief–but is he fair to Dewey or has he constructed a "straw man"? No doubt, Garrison (1997) and Kestenbaum (2002) would

argue the latter. Both might assert that Dewey upheld "ecstatic values" as Walsh defined them: experiencing the extraordinary in the ordinary. In fact, Kestenbaum tacitly[13] employs Simone Weil to support his position that Dewey was more interested in transcendent values than is generally believed. Is Kestenbaum more accurate in his picture of Dewey, or is Walsh? Is Kestenbaum reading into Dewey a Platonism that Garrison would adamantly maintain isn't there? These questions will be considered in due course as this dissertation attempts to uncover Dewey's and Weil's views on wisdom and education.

Although Kestenbaum (2002) points to a transcendent dimension that Weil and Dewey might share, there are other grounds on which they could find a basis for discussion. Both thinkers adopted a similar approach in pursuit of wisdom: For both, experience was the foundational platform on which they constructed their ideas, and for both, practical action was the criterion for testing the validity of those same ideas. Even though Dewey was much more explicit in connecting his notion of experience to his ideas of nature (Dewey, 1929a), art (1934/1979), and education (1938/1963), Weil's respect for experience is revealed in a statement that enucleates her thought: "Faith is the experience that the intelligence is lighted up by love" (Weil, 1952-55/1956, p. 240). Dewey echoes this: "That God is love is a more worthy idealization than that the divine is power. Since love at its best brings illumination and wisdom, this meaning is as worthy as that the

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[13] Actually, Kestenbaum (2002, pp. 17-18, 32-33) uses Iris Murdoch to bolster his argument. I do not know if he is aware of it, but Murdoch was deeply influenced by Weil and acknowledged her debt, especially to Weil's concept of attention which Kestenbaum uses second-hand. See Murdoch (1985, pp. 34, 40, 50, 104).

divine is truth" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 167). However, for Weil, "idealizations" of God were problematic. She shows this in one striking illustration (Cayley, 2002): Imagine two people who have not experienced God. One is an atheist. The other believes in God. Who is closer to God? The atheist is closer, because he doesn't have a false conception of God which gets in the way. This raises all kinds of questions about how one can properly interpret an experience, but it does demonstrate how fundamental the notion of experience is in her thought.

This dissertation will analyze and compare the published writings of John Dewey and Simone Weil on wisdom and how to educate for a love of it. Out of this comparative analysis, a dialectical method will be devised whereby the views of one thinker will be critiqued by the views of the other and vice versa.

The second and third chapters have an identical structure. Each chapter–the second on Dewey and the third on Weil–is introduced by a biographical sketch and then proceeds to an analysis that is structured around three questions: What is wisdom? How is wisdom connected to experience? How does one educate for a love of wisdom?

In the fourth chapter, the analysis employs a dialectical or back-and-forth method: Dewey's assertions are examined through the eyes of Weil and vice-versa . While not quite reaching the status of a dialogue, the chapter concludes with a brief imaginary conversation between Dewey and Weil. The comparison attempts to answer three questions: How is wisdom connected to experience from a psychological perspective? How is wisdom connected to the social dimension of experience? How is wisdom connected to nature?

In the fifth chapter, the comparison of Dewey and Weil continues by examining how one can educate for, and be educated by, a love of wisdom. After summarizing the short history of Dewey's laboratory school, the discussion is guided by the following question: How does one educate for love of wisdom, taking into account its connection to experience and its connection to thinking?

In the sixth and final chapter, love is examined in its relationship to wisdom. What does it mean to love wisdom? Do Dewey and Weil share the same love? Finally, certain lines of inquiry are suggested for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: JOHN DEWEY AND THE LOVE OF WISDOM

In this chapter, a selection of John Dewey's writings will be analyzed to examine his answers to the following questions: What is wisdom? How is wisdom connected to experience? How does one educate for a love of wisdom? Before embarking on this task, Dewey's life will be reviewed briefly. I draw on four sources for this biographical sketch: Good (2006), Levine (n.d.), Rockefeller (1991), and Westbrook (1991). The purpose of this short biography is to provide the reader with a context within which to better understand and assess his ideas. If wisdom is deeply connected to practice, then the deeds accomplished by a thinker may shed some light. However, readers must resist the temptation to use biographical information to "psychologize" or explain away his ideas, or worse, to provide ammunition for *ad hominem* attacks.

Biographical Sketch

John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont on 20 October 1859. His father was a grocer who volunteered to fight for the Union in the Civil War. His mother was a devout evangelical Christian who valued education–she was very concerned that John and his two brothers were "right with Jesus" (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 37) and encouraged her sons to read extensively and to set their sights on becoming the first Deweys to obtain university degrees. Dewey completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Vermont in 1879. For the next 3 years, he taught high school–2 years in Pennsylvania and 1 year in Vermont. One evening during his time in Pennsylvania he had a mystical experience in which he felt at one with the universe. According to Westbrook (1991): "He would never lose touch with this feeling, though his interpretation of its meaning and implications would change dramatically" (p. 8).

Dissatisfied with highschool teaching and encouraged by having an article accepted by the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Dewey decided to enroll as a full-time graduate student at the first American university dedicated to scientific research in the modern sense–the fledgling Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. His most influential instructors were the philosopher George Sylvester Morris, with whom he completed his training in Hegelian philosophy, and the psychologist George Stanley Hall, with whom he developed a growing appreciation for the experimental methods of modern science. At this stage of his intellectual development, Hegel seemed to offer Dewey a way to hold onto the insights of empirical science without letting go of a Christian idealism. More important, Dewey was drawn to Hegel's elaborate synthesis which pictured reality as an ordered whole of distinct-yet-related parts that could be experienced and known. Hegel rejected all dualisms, especially the Kantian one between knowable phenomena (things-available-to-experience) and unknowable noumena (things-beyond-experience). Dewey's lifelong attack on "either/or thinking" echoed Hegel. After completing a dissertation on Kant's psychology, Dewey received his doctorate from Hopkins in 1884 (Levine, n.d.).

Later that summer, he accepted an offer to teach philosophy at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Two years later he married a former student, Alice Chipman, who had been nurtured in an environment that prized independent thinking. According to Rockefeller (1991), the marriage to Alice transformed him: "By the end of his ten years in Ann Arbor the lonely, bookish, and self-conscious graduate student of the early 1880s had become a well-adjusted, well-liked, and highly respected (if controversial), professor, active citizen, and family man" (p. 149). In 1887, he published his first major work.

Psychology attempted to combine neo-Hegelian idealism with the latest results in empirical science. This was met with stinging criticism by many, including his former teacher, George Stanley Hall, and fellow philosopher, William James (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 26-28). He seemed to accept the rebuke from empiricists that "the Absolute" was a concept that could only be postulated *a priori*, for Dewey soon abandoned it and increasingly sought to ground his work in a Darwinian naturalism. His personal life increasingly reflected his academic work in this regard. For example, overruling the objections of his mother, he did not send his children to Sunday school, and even though he maintained his membership in the First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor, the ties to institutional Christianity were severed when he and his family moved to Chicago in 1894. The 10-year sojourn at the University of Michigan was interrupted by a year of teaching at the University of Minnesota (1888-1889). Dewey returned to the University of Michigan in 1889 to head the philosophy department after the untimely death of his former mentor and colleague, G. S. Morris.

Influenced by his wife and the writings of British idealist Thomas Hill Green, Dewey's thinking took a decisive, practical turn: He wanted to connect philosophy to the wider life of society, to use philosophy as an instrument that could help people from all social strata become more active and intelligent participants in a truly democratic form of life. One striking example was his aborted attempt to enter the "real" life of newspaper publishing in 1892. Franklin Ford, a utopian journalist, convinced Dewey to join him in producing a newspaper free of commercial interests–*Thought News*–that would ostensibly aid the reading public in thinking about social issues in a meaningful way. When Ford's

grandiose announcement in the *Detroit Tribune* was lampooned by the local press, Dewey distanced himself from the project, and it fell apart before the first issue was published (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 51-58). Nevertheless, Dewey did not retreat into the ivory towers of academe: The desire to connect his thinking with a wider public remained strong for the rest of his life, and he continually looked for ways in which he could contribute as a philosopher to strengthen the democratic currents of American society.

By the time Dewey accepted an offer to chair the philosophy department at the newly formed University of Chicago in 1894, he had moved away from neo-Hegelian idealism:[14] His philosophical attention focused less on metaphysics and more on ethics, logical theory, and education. He attracted young scholars (such as George Herbert Mead), whom he forged into a community of inquiry. Under his leadership they began to build the logical and psychological foundations for an approach to philosophy that followed the groundbreaking efforts of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, an approach that would later be called "pragmatic."

Pursuing his interest in the practice of education, he founded the University of Chicago Elementary School (1896-1903) to try out educational methods which assumed that learning best occurred through active inquiry aimed at solving authentic problems. Dewey (1899, 1902/1990) wanted this school to model "a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons" (p. 14). Putting occupations at the core of the elementary curriculum, Dewey wanted children to learn and

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[14] Good (2006) distinguishes between neo-Hegelianism and Hegel. He argues that the "Hegelian deposit" in Dewey's thinking was substantial and that Dewey never abandoned a humanist/historicist reading of Hegel.

grow *through* such authentic activities as woodworking, cooking, sewing, and gardening. Unlike trade schools that emphasized training for the development of manual skills, Dewey wanted the occupational experience to be educative (i.e., to balance and integrate intellectual problem-solving with manual skill development). This meant that in tackling a problematic situation, a child in his school was responsible for defining the problem, for formulating a plan of action in tackling it, and for selecting appropriate materials and tools to be used in implementing the plan. This included developing the capacity to perceive errors along with the ability to correct them (Dewey, 1899,1902/1990, p. 133). Of course, this whole process was guided by a teacher who had to develop the art of appropriate intervention–knowing when to offer suggestions and when to back off.

With the publication of *The School and Society* in 1899 and *The Child and the Curriculum* in 1902 (Dewey, 1899, 1902/1990), Dewey was becoming an influential voice in educational reform. Nevertheless, the University of Chicago did not wholeheartedly support Dewey's laboratory school. He had to scramble constantly for funds to keep the school afloat, and finally, in 1904 when his wife's position as principal of the school was terminated, Dewey resigned (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 111-113).

With plans to begin teaching philosophy and psychology the following year at Columbia University in New York City, John Dewey embarked on a European vacation with his wife and children. In Ireland, the family suffered its second tragic loss: Son Gordon died of typhoid fever. (In 1895 son Morris had died of diphtheria during the first family trip to Europe.) According to Rockefeller (1991):

The loss of Morris, Gordon, and the "Dewey School" was never forgotten, but it

> did not break his spirit. His gentle kindly disposition and fundamentally positive attitude toward life remained intact. He continued to find a sustaining sense of meaning in his life and work, which was carried on in a profoundly productive way at Columbia. (p. 232)

His thinking on education continued to develop as he studied various school reforms. On one occasion in 1913, he introduced Maria Montessori to a packed audience in Carnegie Hall. His evaluation of the Montessori method gives us an insightful glimpse into his own conceptions. It appeared in one chapter of *Schools of To-morrow* (1915), which he coauthored with his daughter Evelyn. Although they appreciated Montessori's didactic materials as useful for very young children, Dewey and Dewey criticized her method for its rigid structure, its distance from the problems that children encounter outside of school, and its neglect of the social dimension in education:

> Each pupil works independently on material that is self-corrective. But there is no freedom allowed the child to create. He is free to choose which apparatus he will use, but never to choose his own ends, never to bend a material to his own plans. For the material is limited to a fixed number of things which must be handled in a certain way. (pp. 157-158) [15]

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[15] Reflecting the conventions of their time, Dewey and Weil used the masculine form when referring to singular human beings in a generic sense of either gender or when using such abstract terms as "mankind" or "man" which today would be more appropriately designated as "humankind" or "humanity." In this and subsequent chapters, I will use the feminine gender when referring to singular human beings to counterbalance this. Although in ancient Greek and Jewish writings, wisdom is often personified as a woman (Sophia), my purpose is to reduce awkwardness in style–avoiding "his/her" in my own writing and dispensing with "[*sic*]" when citing Dewey or Weil.

In attacking Montessori's conception of freedom as excessively individualistic, Dewey and Dewey qualified their own view of liberty in education:

> Help from others is not to be feared as an encroachment upon liberty, but that kind of help which restricts the use of children's own intelligence in forming ends and using ingenuity, initiative and inventiveness in the selection and adaptation of materials. The limitation of material to performing exercises calculated to train an isolated sense – a situation that never presents itself in life – seems to the American teacher a greater limitation of freedom than that which arises from the need of cooperation with others in the performance of common activities. (p. 161)

The following year Dewey elaborated and developed this view into what would be his most comprehensive statement on education–*Democracy and Education* (1916/1966).

As the United States was on the verge of entering the First World War, Dewey became more politically active. When he declared his support for U. S. involvement on the grounds that an Allied victory would clear the ground for democratic reform in Europe, Randolph Bourne, one of his former students, chided Dewey for allowing his clear-thinking pragmatism to be clouded by an American chauvinism that played into the hands of capitalist elites who controlled governments.[16] By contrast, when Dewey turned his attention to the Polish-American community, who were concerned about the status of their homeland after the war, he remained truer to his ideals by siding with the democratic socialists (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 197-227).

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[16] Dewey's argument for using military force to establish the conditions for democracy seem eerily similar to the one used by supporters of the American invasion of Iraq.

From 1919 to 1921, John and Alice Dewey journeyed through Japan and China as part of an extended sabbatical. He was often invited to speak, and one series of lectures given at the Imperial University of Tokyo was published in 1920 as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Dewey (1920/1948) wanted to modernize philosophy, to rebuild it from scratch as a human science following the pattern of natural science. As he had done with education, he aimed to liberate philosophy from the dualism that so often opposed theory to practice:

> Reason is experimental intelligence, conceived after the pattern of science, and used in the creation of social arts; it has something to do. It liberates man from the bondage of the past, due to ignorance and accident hardened into custom. It projects a better future and assists man in its realization. And its operation is always subject to test in experience. The plans which are formed, the principles which man projects as guides of reconstructive action, are not dogmas. They are hypotheses to be worked out in practice, and to be rejected, corrected and expanded as they fail or succeed in giving our present experience the guidance it requires. (p. 96)

Soon after returning from Asia, Dewey was enlisted to join a group that wished to outlaw war. Part of this involvement pulled him into a war of words with critics such as the influential journalist Walter Lippman, a "democratic realist," who argued that modern society was too complex for the type of participatory democracy that Dewey idealistically espoused. Although Dewey agreed with Lippman's description of the problem, he did not agree with his solution. Unlike Lippman, who saw a limited role for participatory

democracy in a modern industrial state ruled by rotating elites assisted by experts, Dewey would not let go of his ideal even though he did not give clear instructions on how to attain it: to strengthen and stabilize local communities so that frequent face-to-face interactions would naturally develop into a participatory democracy (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 260-318).

During the "Roaring Twenties," Dewey wrote prolifically on a variety of subjects such as social psychology (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922) and political philosophy (*The Public and Its Problems*, 1927/1954). *Experience and Nature* (1929a) was an elaborate attempt to lay the metaphysical groundwork for his own reconstructed philosophy. Here Dewey laid out the core of his pragmatism and instrumentalism by transforming the orthodox language of traditional philosophy: The ontological distinctions of subject and object were recast into the functional distinctions of organism and environment within a holistic reality called nature. Experience, which occurred in the transaction between organism and environment, was ontologically prior to knowledge. Thinking was a conscious activity which took place after the organism experienced a disruption in the transaction. Knowledge was gained after the organism had found a way to eliminate the disruption, with the result that subsequent experience was reconstructed and enriched by this knowledge.

During the 1920s, his fame as an educational theorist kept growing, and three countries invited him to study their school systems–Turkey, Mexico, and the Soviet Union. Although he admired Russian society and its educational system, he grew increasingly critical of Stalinist oppression and of Marxist dialectical materialism, which

he regarded as another form of philosophical absolutism. After the Mexico trip in 1926, Alice Dewey's health began to deteriorate; she died the following year. His children supported Dewey through this loss and assisted him with domestic matters for the next two decades (Rockefeller, 1991, pp. 360-361).

Dewey retired from Columbia in 1930, yet he remained active in public life and wrote prodigiously. He worked in such organizations as the League for Independent Political Action and the People's Lobby in the 1930s to challenge a two-party system that was too closely tied to big business and too far removed from the common person. In 1937, at the age of 77, he chaired a commission that investigated Soviet charges of treason and murder against Leon Trotsky in Mexico. According to Westbrook (1991), "Dewey proved to be an alert, patient, and thorough chairman whose energy and devotion to the task at hand impressed observers as well as Trotsky himself" (p. 481). The works he published during this decade explored the religious, educational, and aesthetic dimensions of experience (Dewey, 1934/1960, 1938/1963, 1934/1979).

During the 1940s, he wrote over 50 essays and book reviews. In 1946, John Dewey married Roberta Grant (who was more than 40 years younger), and together they adopted two young children. On June 1, 1952, less than 6 years into his second marriage, he died. Westbrook (1991) provides a fitting epitaph: "Although he was slowed in his last months by a broken hip – suffered while playing with his children – he remained intellectually engaged to the very end of his life" (p. 537).

What Is Wisdom?

Here we have a life that spanned close to a century! Born before the American

Civil War, John Dewey lived long enough to see the beginning of the Cold War. If wisdom comes with age, then Dewey certainly deserves our attention. In an essay delivered on his behalf by one of his former students (Sidney Hook) to an international gathering of philosophers in Amsterdam in 1948, Dewey (1948/1989c) implored his colleagues to consider

> a *re*-turn to the view of philosophy put forward of old by Socrates. It constitutes search for the wisdom that shall be a guide of life. It marks a return to the original view of philosophy as a *moral* undertaking in the sense in which the moral and the deeply and widely human are identical. (p. 365)

However, unlike the ancient Greek philosophers and their medieval successors who searched for wisdom as a guide to life by looking for eternal verities that were believed to be the unchanging ground of existence, Dewey argued that one should search for wisdom in the other direction: Keeping a steady gaze fixed on the changing flux of everyday life, one should look for possibilities suggested by present experience that could point towards means available for constructing a better way of life.

If we grant Dewey the assumption that wisdom cannot be found in some unchanging form beyond the reach of experience, how would one find it within experience, and how would one recognize it if it was found? In other words, did Dewey have a clear idea of what he was looking for? Did he have a concept of wisdom? Dewey never wrote a treatise or essay on wisdom per se. All we have are a few statements scattered among the 37 volumes of his collected works.

Let us consider some of them in chronological order. The first clear statement

appears in "Philosophy and Democracy," an essay published in 1918. In it Dewey had connected wisdom with moral values at least 30 years before the Amsterdam conference noted above:

> By wisdom we mean not systematic and proved knowledge of fact and truth, but a conviction of moral values, a sense for the better kind of life to be led. Wisdom is a moral term, and like every kind of moral term refers not to the constitution of things already in existence, not even if that constitution be magnified into eternity and absoluteness. As a moral term it refers to a choice about something to be done, a preference for living this sort of life rather than that. It refers not to accomplished reality but to a desired future which our desires, when translated into articulate conviction, may bring about into existence. (Dewey, 1918/1982, p. 44)

In the above statement, Dewey sharply distinguished his search for wisdom from the older metaphysical quest: the wisdom he was looking for was time bound and forward looking; it was directed to changing present conditions for a better future, which for Dewey meant creating a more democratic way of life. A decade later, he qualified the essentially future orientation of wisdom by noting its necessary connection to situations in the present: "For wisdom as to ends depends upon acquaintance with conditions and means, and unless the acquaintance is adequate and fair, wisdom becomes a sublimated folly of self-deception" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 46).

Later on in the same volume, Dewey (1929a) pointed out that wisdom's dependence upon knowledge of environmental conditions is not an academic exercise

performed in the comfortable confines of a classroom far removed from an actual situation where such conditions are felt and experienced:

> Barely to note and register that contingency is a trait of natural events has nothing to do with wisdom. To note, however, contingency in connection with a concrete situation of life is that fear of the Lord which is at least the beginning of wisdom. The detection and definition of nature's end is in itself barren. But the undergoing that actually goes on in the light of this discovery brings one close to supreme issues: life and death. (pp. 334 -335)

The above passage also demonstrates a rhetorical device that Dewey often used to bring home a point with his readers. His audience would have been very familiar with Biblical allusions,[17] but Dewey frequently employed them in ways which would shock orthodox Christians who read him carefully. For Christians or Jews, the experience of contingent conditions was a wake-up call to the fragility of life. It led believers to fearfully acknowledge their dependence on a supernatural God, and this would impel them to reconsider their way of living–the beginning of wisdom. Dewey saw contingency playing a similar role in his view of wisdom, a view, however, which did not allow within its scope anything "above" or "beyond" nature. In Dewey's reading of history, prescientific cultures should not be blamed for their reliance on dogma and cult to bring consolation in the midst of natural contingencies. They did not know what they were doing. But we should know better: We have access to the proven methods of modern science which can

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[17] Dewey is alluding to Psalm 111, verse 10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

help us secure a better future within the precarious present. There is no supernatural god to save us from the hard labor associated with reform.

A few years later, in a substantially revised textbook on ethics which he coauthored with James Tufts, Dewey looked more carefully at how our desires for the future could be intelligently regulated by wisdom:

> Our discussion has centered on the goods which approve themselves to the thoughtful, or morally "wise," person in their relations to the satisfactions which suggest themselves because of immediate and intense desire, impulse, and appetite. The office of reflection we have seen to be the formation of a judgment of value in which particular satisfactions are placed as integral parts of conduct as a consistent harmonious whole. If values did not get in one another's way, if, that is, the realization of one desire were not incompatible with that of another, there would be no need of reflection. We should grasp and enjoy each thing as it comes along. Wisdom, or as it is called on the ordinary plane, prudence, sound judgment, is the ability to foresee consequences in such a way that we form ends which grow into one another and reenforce one another. Moral folly is the surrender of the greater good for the lesser; it is snatching at one satisfaction in a way which prevents us from having others and which gets us subsequently into trouble and dissatisfaction. (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, pp. 210-211)

We will return to Dewey's concept of wisdom as the ability to foresee consequences and form reenforcing ends after we complete this very brief survey of his explicit statements.

Responding to one of his critics, Dewey (1949/1989d) pointed out the connection

between wisdom and knowledge in a way that succinctly summed up his position:

> wisdom being not knowledge but knowledge-plus; knowledge turned into account in the instruction and guidance it may convey in piloting life through the storms and shoals that beset life-experience as well as into such havens of consummatory experience as enrich our human life from time to time. (p. 383)

From the few explicit statements reviewed above, Dewey's view of wisdom can be summarized as follows: Wisdom is a guide for living, a conviction of moral values, a sense for a better life. As such, wisdom aims to change present conditions in order to achieve a better future. This guide for living involves possessing knowledge that can be applied, and it works only as a guide insofar as it *is* applied. As a sense for a better life, wisdom is "the ability to foresee consequences in such a way that we form ends which grow into one another and reenforce one another" (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 210). Wisdom could be viewed from various angles–as a guide, a conviction, a sense, an ability, a combination of thinking and acting–but each angle did not quite capture the whole of wisdom. Put another way, wisdom integrated the cognitive, affective, and sensorimotor dimensions of life when viewed as a whole.

What sane person would not desire that? Who would not want to resolve the inner contradictions that so often make it difficult to live in a unified, coherent fashion? However, wisdom was not a commodity that was easily purchased or a technique that was discovered in the armchair of comfortable contemplation: It could be found only in the changing circumstances of everyday life where danger and risk could not be avoided. Fear accompanied anyone who searched for it there. Wisdom was found in the

experience of living.

How Is Wisdom Connected to Experience?

As a philosopher who tried to reclaim the vocation first spelled out by the ancient Greeks, Dewey found himself in a shrinking minority. His colleagues in the academic profession were (and to a great extent still are) engaged less in philosophy and more in what Alexander (2003) calls "philepistemy"– the love of knowledge:

> The modern practice of philosophy, like the university itself, appropriated a quasi-scientific model in which rigorous technical analysis of discrete problems isolated and concentrated upon for their own sake is believed to lead to the increase in "knowledge" . . . . it is paramount to recognize that any endeavor to think in a Deweyan mode is to engage in the practice of philosophy as the love of wisdom. (pp. 129-130)

For Dewey, the search for wisdom involved reflecting on the practice of living first of all.[18] Even when evaluating a theory's inner coherence, the underlying purpose was to see how effectively that theory could inform and enrich lived experience through practical action.

Obviously, examining the few fragments we have culled from Dewey's writings which explicitly mention wisdom are not enough to go on. Few questions are answered. Many more are raised. What does it mean to look for wisdom within experience? How is this moral quest intrinsically connected to what science has shown us about nature? We

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[18] Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner would feel at home in the wider and more inclusive expanses of Dewey's thought.

need to go further into his underlying theory with the confidence that the few explicit fragments reviewed above are merely the tips of an iceberg.

To flesh out Dewey's approach to answering these questions, we need to begin with Dewey's starting point–the transaction between a human being and her surrounding environment. This implies a psychological approach at first–the transaction is best understood from the experience of an individual but without ignoring her connections to other humans who are part of the surrounding environment–connections that will be explored in due course. Therefore, we will begin with his introduction to social psychology (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922), where the notion of habit plays a pivotal role in understanding how transactions with the environment are established, maintained, and reconstructed. Since wisdom is a moral activity, we will go on to examine his ethical theory coauthored with James Tufts (*Ethics*, 1932/1989), and finally, since wisdom must take into account the conditions of existence, we will conclude with a brief look at how he conceived the nature of reality–his metaphysical theory (*Experience and Nature*, 1929a).

Wisdom and Habit

Dewey (1922) begins *Human Nature and Conduct* with the grand anti-Kantian assumption which he shared with Hegel–namely, that the moral realm and the natural realm could not and should not be viewed as ontologically distinct. Nevertheless, he is asking the reader to adopt this stance *a priori*, implicitly promising that if you stick with him and follow his train of thought, a more balanced approach to wisdom will emerge:

Until the integrity of morals with human nature and of both with the environment

> is recognized, we shall be deprived of the aid of past experience to cope with the most acute and deep problems of life . . . . The intelligent acknowledgment of the continuity of nature, man, and society will alone secure a growth of morals which will be serious without being fanatical, aspiring without sentimentality, adapted to reality without conventionality, sensible without taking the form of calculation of profits, idealistic without being romantic. (pp. 12-13)

The continuity of nature with humans was secured through a transaction with the environment that Dewey called "habit." A human was "a creature of habit, not of reason, nor yet of instinct" (p. 125). A habit was more than an overt, routine activity or series of repeated actions: It was a predisposition to act in a certain way that included a "special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions" (p. 42). A habit was acquired through the mediation of other humans: A child began life outside the womb as a bundle of ceaseless energy during its waking hours. A helpless infant was a dynamic series of impulsive events that gradually acquired co-ordination and control of its own activity through interchanges with caring adults who gave meaning to physical discharges: "You're hungry, aren't you? Here, come to mommy. There, doesn't that taste good?" Habits were acquired through social mediation, and required an ongoing, supportive social environment to develop into wiser dispositions.

Dewey maintained that humans must be understood as active beings who respond to stimuli only after or during a specific act in which the stimulus is established . The stimulus is constructed in a habit–a predisposition–as a result of prior activity: In a

habitual transaction with the environment, one happens upon something that is transformed by habit into a stimulus for subsequent responses. For example, my taste for Coca-Cola was developed after my first experience drinking a Coke, and every cola since that time does not taste exactly the same because I carry a deposit from that first experience in combination with a transaction in which the related terms–organism and environment–have also undergone change. The stimulus associated with viewing or thinking about that particular drink was established in my habit *after* the first encounter. To cite a more extreme example: The first high of a heroin addict can never be repeated, yet through it a potent stimulus is constructed, and the first iron link of a powerful drug habit is forged.

In contrast with habits (such as those associated with drugs) that produce immediate satisfactions, the development of a habitual transaction in which satisfactions are not immediately received–such as a training regimen to improve cardiovascular conditioning–requires persistent effort and attention. Once achieved, it becomes a mechanism which seems to take on a life of its own and requires little thought – until a disruption is experienced. Whether felt as a minor annoyance or a major affliction, a disruption is an occasion whereby the rudiments of wisdom may develop. Dewey (1922) delineates the continuity that a human organism has in transaction with an environment:

> Normally, the environment remains sufficiently in harmony with the body of organized activities [habits] to sustain most of them in active function. But a novel factor in the surroundings releases some impulse which tends to initiate a different and incompatible activity, to bring about a redistribution of the elements

of organized activity. (p. 179)

The novel factor acts as a stimulus to release the impulse because the organism's habits include a sensitivity to certain classes of stimuli as is illustrated in the following semifictional example.

It is 1534. Let us imagine the European Jacques Cartier and the aboriginal chief Donnacona walking through a forested region along the banks of a great river which Cartier had named in honor of Saint Lawrence. Donnacona stops and motions to Cartier to do the same. Donnacona has noticed that the birds are very quiet–a stillness that may signify the presence of other aboriginals, perhaps his hated enemy the Iroquois. Unlike Cartier who would have walked noisily and unwittingly into an ambush, Donnacona has cultivated a sensitivity necessary to survive in this environment–a predisposition acquired through the habits and customs of his own people.

Donnacona motions to his warriors behind him. They understand and are ready when the Iroquois attack. Cartier has his sword out in time to stop an onrushing Iroquois. Realizing that they have lost the advantage of surprise, the enemy raiding party quickly retreats, with Donnacona's warriors in pursuit. Cartier looks at the fallen Iroquois dying in front of him. If he had been slower in drawing his sword . . . . He is indebted to Donnacona. There is a lot more to these "savages" then he thought.

> Now at these moments of a shifting in activity conscious feeling and thought arise and are accentuated. The disturbed adjustment of organism is reflected in a temporary strife which concludes in a coming to terms of the old habit and the new impulse. (Dewey, 1922, p. 179)

In other words, the organism experiences cognitive dissonance until–as Piaget might describe it–the organism accommodates itself to the new information by constructing a new schema (a new habit) that incorporates the old one. Dewey's description more explicitly places thinking, feeling, impulse, and action as functional (not ontologically distinct) elements holistically and interdependently connected within an experience:

> In this period of redistribution impulse furnishes the focus about which reorganization swirls. Our attention in short is always directed forward to bring to notice something which is immanent but which as yet escapes us. Impulse defines the peering, the search, the inquiry. (p. 180)

Dewey avoids using language which may compromise his "integrationist" position. The older psychology would bring in a faculty called "reason"–an ability to think rationally which is essentially foreign to our "lower" nature . Dewey locates the ability to think and to re-search within this impulse which the older psychology would label as part of "desire"–an "irrational" faculty which opposes itself to reason. Dewey places the opposition among competing desires, one or some of which are reflective and oriented to inquiry:

> During this search, old habit supplies content, filling, definite, recognizable, subject-matter. It begins with vague presentiment of what we are going towards. As organized habits are definitely employed and focused, the confused situation takes on form, it is "cleared up"–the essential function of intelligence. (p. 180)

The old, disrupted habit is not cast aside–it is broken up and redistributed into a new organized activity which reestablishes a harmony among competing desires at the same

time as it reconnects the organism with the environment in a way that is stronger and richer.

How does this happen? It occurs through deliberation which is "a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action" (Dewey, 1922, p. 190):

> Deliberation means precisely that activity is disintegrated, and that its various elements hold one another up. [They get in each other's way.] While none has force enough to become the center of a re-directed activity, or to dominate a course of action, each has enough power to check others from exercising mastery. Activity does not cease in order to give way to reflection; activity is turned from execution into intra-organic channels, resulting in dramatic rehearsal. (p. 191)

Notice how Dewey keeps activity at the centre of an organism. Reflection or thinking is activity turned inwards. In Piagetan language, concrete operational thinking (a child tries out various courses of action in the environment by manipulating various objects) becomes formal operational thinking (a child tries out various courses of action in his mind).

Dewey's brilliant analysis challenges Kantian-conditioned habits of thinking that run in sealed-off channels. It is difficult for the Western mind to shake off ontological dualisms–theory/practice, thinking/feeling, reason/desire–and thereby understand Dewey's position. A person with a Kantian mind-set is tempted either to accuse him of reducing morality and rationality to mindless biological mechanisms, or to disparage his thinking as being too vague, as not making clear enough distinctions that make sense to a

rationalist who is more comfortable with analysis than synthesis, with thinking than with feeling, with theory than with practice. Such a person might be afraid to make the transition from ontological designations (the mind exists in itself) to functional ones (the "mind" is shorthand for describing how biological impulses are organized in habits), because she would hate to give in to her "lower" nature and lose the ability to think clearly and to act morally, i.e., to choose disinterestedly, without regard for preference.

To return to the Dewey's analysis: After imaginatively rehearsing various courses of action, one is chosen. It is not an arbitrary selection made by a detached observer. This "chosen" one somehow arranges the other options around it like iron filings fitting into the force field of a magnet. The impeded impulse has found a way through the obstacle caused by a disruption:

> Choice is made as soon as some habit, or some combination of elements of habits and impulses, finds a way fully open . . . . Choice is not the emergence of preference out of indifference [the Kantian moral position]. It is the emergence of a unified preference out of competing preferences. (Dewey, 1922, pp. 192-193)

Here Dewey reworks Plato. The Platonic virtue of temperance–the right ordering of desire–is here intrinsically connected with "reasonableness." Instead of a Platonic tripartite soul (the rational part with the virtue of wisdom, the spirited part with the virtue of courage, and the desiring or appetitive part with the virtue of temperance), Dewey allows the various desires to *mingle* (the Latin root of temper) in the act of deliberation. The beginning of wisdom originates in a temperance that naturally emerges from "below" rather than being imposed from "above:"

> Reasonableness is in fact a quality of an effective relationship among desires rather than a thing opposed to desire. It signifies the order, perspective, proportion which is achieved, during deliberation, out of a diversity of earlier incompatible preferences. (p. 194)

As Dewey conceives it, reasonableness or rationality (reasonableness with a mathematical accent) is a pattern of ratios in proportionate relationships among desires, a pattern which effectively and efficiently meets the requirements of acting wisely within a specific situation. It is a pattern that fits *this* situation. It is good in the ancient sense: It fits what is needed in this particular case. Deweyan wisdom is situational ethics in the best sense: Each situation is unique; therefore a pattern applied in one situation cannot apply *as well* in a new situation. However, the pattern of a previous situation can be employed as an *hypothesis* to guide deliberation in a new situation without applying it as a *rule* or *recipe*. Dewey distinguished between principles and rules: Principles were inductive tools for analyzing specific situations in the same way that hypotheses gave focus and direction to scientific experiments. Rules were more like the deductive axioms formulated by Aristotelian science which assumed a static universe: "A principle evolves in connection with the course of experience, being a generalized statement of what sort of consequences and values tend to be realized in certain kinds of situations; a rule is taken as something ready-made and fixed" (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 276). Experienced teachers know that they can never present the same lesson twice in exactly the same way. Often what worked well with one group of students is relatively ineffective with another.

Once the choice is made, imaginative rehearsal (inner activity) is transformed into

practical action (outer activity). Such rationality has integrity because the desires are held together in a harmonious whole. It is a "wholesome" passion. Without the pattern of reasonableness, desires would compete with each other or get in each other's way, or–as is seen in a person who is *in*temperate–one desire will master the others in a way which is not "wholesome." But paradoxically, the pattern emerges out of confusion and deliberation. Things have to work themselves out–it takes patience to wait for the pattern to emerge, to not force the issue by imposing a pattern which does not do justice to all of the desires. Rationality and temperance are one in Dewey's psychology.

But then Dewey (1922) makes a startling assertion: "This implies, of course, the presence of a comprehensive object, one which coordinates, organizes and functions each factor of the situation which give rise to conflict, suspense and deliberation" (p. 195). What is this comprehensive object which effects the organization of altered habits? Is Dewey slipping in a Platonic form here that somehow exists apart from the competing desires? No, the object in question is not an eternal idea existing in a realm beyond nature. It is an "end-in-view"–a consequence of a particular course of action foreseen in imaginative deliberation or dramatic rehearsal. The end-in-view emerges within the intraorganic activity of deliberation, guiding deliberation until the end-in-view furnishes "an adequate stimulus to overt action" (p. 223). "In a strict sense an end-in-view is a *means* in present action; present action is not a means to a remote end" (p. 226). The end-in-view is a "means to unification and liberation of present conflicting, confused habits and impulses" (p. 229).

Dewey took the taken-for-granted views on the fixed relationship of means to

ends and threw them back into the swirling flux of present activity, where they had really existed all along. Ends did not exist outside of activity to terminate action (to end it); they functioned as pivots inside action. An end was a foreseen consequence of action, not a goal that had to be reached by any means. Dewey eschewed the maxim, the end justifies the means: It did not have a legitimate status in his moral theory because ends were dependent on means–not the other way around. Proper moral deliberation involved asking, "If I do this, what will be the result?" not "If I choose this goal, what is the best way to get there?" Dewey (1922) elaborates further:

> Moral theorists constantly assume that the continuous course of events can be arrested at the point of a particular object; that men can plunge with their own desires into the unceasing flow of change, and seize upon some object as their end irrespective of everything else. The use of intelligence to discover the object that will best operate as a releasing and unifying stimulus in the existing situation is discounted . . . . overlooking means is only a device for failing to note those ends, or consequences, which, if they were noted would be seen to be so evil that action would be estopped. (p. 228)

Wisdom–intelligent deliberation–involves seizing upon a promising object in imaginative rehearsal and then considering how such an object or course of action is connected to everything else within the situation.

Holding back the immediate impulse to act prematurely takes force. For a child, this force originates in the environment–either immediately through the felt consequences of its own overt actions (such as the piercing pain of a burning candle) or mediately

through the restraining actions of others. In the first case, it is assumed that the child is learning the consequences of its own behavior within a social milieu which protects the child from potentially fatal results (such as falling through an open window of a sixth-floor apartment). In the second case, the restraining actions are initially perceived by the indignant child as consequences. ("I better not do that or I'll get into trouble.") However, it is generally believed that if the restraint imposed by others is accompanied with reasons that make sense to the child and is consistently applied by caring adults who themselves model such restraint in their own behavior (Wolterstorff, 1980), then the child will more likely develop the habit of thinking before acting–a wise habit which transforms or sublimates enough energy needed for restraining and mediating impulse. From this perspective, wisdom in Dewey's psychology can be conceived as a metahabit–a habit of habits–which holds other habits together in the integrity of the self.

Wisdom and the Moral Self in Society

If the foreseen consequences of a particular action look promising in comparison to the consequences of alternative actions which come to mind, then a stimulus to action emerges. This stimulus does two things at once: It unifies the habits and impulses at the same time as it redirects overt actions. How then does Dewey understand the relationship between a self–this bundle of habits–and the stimulus which unifies and liberates the habits, desires, and impulses of which the self is composed? In other words, what is it that connects the self with a particular object? To answer this question we need to consider Dewey's ethical or moral theory.

In Deweyan moral theory, one must recognize the "*essential unity of the self and*

its acts" (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 288). The self cannot be understood apart from its actions. When action ceases, a living body becomes a dead corpse: The self disappears. Inasmuch as the self does exist in any empirical sense, it exists in action. To understand the connection between a self and a particular object, we must look at the self acting with an object. When activity is directed towards an object, the direction is called *interest*: "An interest is, in short, the dominant direction of activity, and in this activity desire is united with an object to be furthered in a decisive choice" (p. 290).

What is the relationship between a self, a specific object, and the interest which connects them? In one sense, the self depends on an object to furnish the interest. Without an object, the interest has no content and does not exist; one must be interested in *something*. In another sense, the make-up of the self determines whether an object has interest. One legislator can be bribed, while another is immune to bribery. The object in each case is the same, but the moral make-up of one legislator is such that the object has a hold over him or her, whereas the moral make-up of the other is such that the object has much less power to persuade. The power of an object to act as a pivot for action depends on the extent to which the self is invested in the object which "as a moving force *includes the self within it*" (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, pp. 291-292).[19]

So, what is a wise person–a truly moral self–in Dewey's eyes? A wise person is someone who recognizes that a self exists in action and that the directions of activity–the interests which are cultivated–change the very make-up of the self:

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[19] This echoes the ancient wisdom of Jesus: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Barker, 2002, p. 1478).

> We prefer spontaneously, we choose deliberately, knowingly. Now every such choice sustains a double relation to the self. It reveals the existing self and it forms the future self . . . . Superficially, the deliberation which terminates in choice is concerned with weighing the values of particular ends. Below the surface, it is a process of discovering what sort of being a person most wants to become. (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, pp. 286-287)

But what is of crucial importance in Dewey's theory–something that has not yet been emphasized in our discussion–is the social factor. There is no such thing as an individual self existing in isolation from other selves (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 300). Even hermits are in debt to the caregivers who provided for them in their formative years and with whom they developed the habits necessary for staying alive.

Growth in wisdom is experienced in deliberation when social connections are taken into account, for a wise person understands that his or her self is realized through actions which respect, honor, and desire those connections:

> The *kind* of self which is formed through action which is faithful to relations with others will be a fuller and broader self than one which is cultivated in isolation from or in opposition to the purposes and needs of others . . . . But to make self-realization a conscious aim might and probably would prevent full attention to those very relationships which bring about the wider development of self. (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 302)

Self-realization or growth of the self is a very desirable outcome, but like happiness it is one of those outcomes or consequences of actions which Dewey warns should not be

conscious ends-in-view. The direct pursuit of happiness or self-realization is a vain endeavor when the conditions which make them possible are ignored; as outcomes they emerge when other activities and interests are consciously pursued.

What are these interests? In other words, what is the connection between the interests which compose the self and the social factor which when taken into account nourishes the development of that same self?

> The final happiness of an individual resides in the supremacy of certain interests in the make-up of character; namely, alert, sincere, enduring interests in the objects in which all can share . . . . the very problem of morals is to form an original body of impulsive tendencies into a voluntary self in which desires and affections centre in the values which are common; in which interest focuses in objects that contribute to the enrichment of the lives of all. (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, pp. 302 -303)

Dewey (1929a) believed that "shared experience is the greatest of human goods" (p. 167). In Biblical language this meant loving your neighbor as yourself: "Various phases of participation by one in other's joy, sorrows, sentiments and purposes, are distinguished by the scope and the depth of the objects that are held in common, from a momentary caress to continued insight and loyalty" (p.167).

This is the democratic ideal that inspired Dewey's search for wisdom. He did not furnish a blueprint for what a democratic society would look like: That would have betrayed his own philosophy. The concrete details and the broad contours of such a society had to be constructed by people in the daily flux of their own situations.

However, he firmly believed that a flourishing and humane society would come into being in the extent to which each member developed the wise habits of character described above. The building of such a society would never cease: Agreements for how to live together would always be subject to renegotiation because the conditions of existence were not static. The values which guided living for one generation could not be passed on *in toto* to another for, as Dewey and Tufts (1932/1989b) maintained, "reflective morality demands observation of particular situations rather than fixed adherence to *a priori* principles" (p. 329). Rather than a blueprint for democracy, they advocated

> the method of democracy, of a positive toleration which amounts to sympathetic regard for the intelligence and personality of others, even if they hold views opposed to ours, and of scientific inquiry into facts and testing of ideas. (p. 329)

The cultivation of wise habits that included the methods of democracy and of scientific inquiry was how Dewey defined the problem of education. But before we consider how to educate for wisdom in the Deweyan sense, we need to examine the metaphysics on which he based his philosophy–his search for wisdom.

Wisdom and Metaphysics

We have shown what Dewey meant by wisdom as a moral quest and how it was connected to his notion of habit and character. We have accepted Dewey's anti-Kantian assumption that the moral and natural realms are continuous in order to see how his view of wisdom is connected to his psychology and his ethical theory. But the assumption itself has not been examined directly. In order to answer more adequately the questions

posed at the beginning–What does it mean to look for wisdom within experience? How is this moral quest intrinsically connected to what science has shown us about nature?–we need to examine the metaphysics on which his anti-Kantian assumption is based. Implied in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), and in *Ethics* (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989b), Dewey's metaphysics is explicitly laid out in *Experience and Nature* (1929a).

Metaphysics or ontology concerns itself with the question of reality. What is real? What is the nature of reality? In asking these questions, Dewey used "existence" or "nature" to stand in for reality: What are the generic traits of existence? What is the nature of nature? As Dewey (1929a) reminds us, the answers to these questions undergird any quest for wisdom:

> The more sure one is that the world which encompasses human life is of such and such a character (no matter what his definition), the more one is committed to try to direct the conduct of life, that of others as well as of himself, upon the basis of the character assigned to the world. (p. 334)

Nevertheless, "the character assigned to the world" will be tested in action as a person tries to live wisely (i.e., in harmony with nature). If the actions fail to achieve a good life, then wisdom will involve examining to what extent a person's metaphysical conceptions were faulty:

> And if he finds that he cannot succeed, that the attempt lands him in confusion, inconsistency and darkness, plunging others into discord and shutting them out from participation, rudimentary precepts instruct him to surrender his assurance as

> a delusion; and to revise his notions of the nature of nature till he makes them more adequate to the concrete facts in which nature is embodied. Man needs the earth in order to walk, the sea to swim or sail, the air to fly. Of necessity he acts within the world, and in order to be, he must in some measure adapt himself as one part of nature to other parts. (p. 334)

Here is where Dewey's metaphysics and anthropology begin together: A human being is a part of nature. To understand the nature of reality, he advocates a philosophic method–empirical naturalism or naturalistic empiricism–which keeps that assertion before us. This method holds together experience and nature by positing two modes of experience–primary or raw experience (what one undergoes or does with little reflection) and secondary or refined experience (what one undergoes or does with more sustained and conscious reflection). Since thought is abstracted–literally drawn from–concrete experience, it is dependent on natural, biological mechanisms organized in transaction with an environment. A person's sensory organs establish her connection to the natural world, and as such, can be trusted to furnish the primary data of raw experience that allow her to think about the general traits of existence: "The very existence of science is evidence that experience is such an occurrence that it penetrates into nature and expands without limit through it" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 4).

In Dewey's naturalism, a mind which can think about nature has natural origins and emerges through an evolutionary development (Darwin is key here). Mind and matter are "different characters of natural events, in which matter expresses their sequential order, and mind the order of their meanings in their logical connections and

dependencies" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 64). The tendency to believe that mind exists apart from matter has its origins in what Dewey calls the philosophic fallacy: A functional distinction (which naturally arises when analyzing experience) is transformed into an ontological one. For example, many of the problems which beset the teaching and learning of mathematics might be more easily resolved if a conscious effort were made to avoid treating numbers as if they existed in some esoteric realm. A number was a concrete adjective long before it ever became an abstract noun. The abstraction performs a function which allows us to do more with concrete things. The use of "manipulatives" in the primary grades is one attempt to keep numbers grounded in concrete reality. Dewey (1929a) believed that:

> The only way to avoid a sharp separation between the mind which is the centre of the processes of experiencing and the natural world which is experienced is to acknowledge that all modes of experiencing are ways in which some genuine traits of nature come to manifest realization. (p. 24)

Therefore, if all modes of experiencing can be trusted to show genuine traits of nature and

> if experience actually presents esthetic and moral traits, then these traits may also be supposed to reach down into nature, and to testify to something that belongs to nature as truly as does the mechanical structure attributed to it in physical science. (p. 5)

Dewey divides the generic traits of existence into two major classes–the stable and the precarious–that when held together in thought have bearing on the moral quest for wisdom:

> We live in a world which is an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies, tight completeness, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences as yet indeterminate....(p. 43)

The various natural occurrences, entangled as they are in various combinations of predictable and unpredictable consequences for experience, are "evidence that wisdom, and hence that love of wisdom which is philosophy, is concerned with choice and administration of their proportional union" (p. 65). This statement is hard to grasp unless we understand how the Hegelian deposit operates in Dewey's metaphysics. In his study of Hegel, Charles Taylor (1975) makes no mention of Dewey, yet one would be hard pressed to find a clearer articulation of Dewey's naturalism than the following drawn from a passage in which Taylor describes the "expressivist" roots of Hegel's philosophy:

> If I am not satisfied with an image of myself as a mind confronting internal and external nature, but must think of myself as life in which nature speaks through thought and will, if therefore I as a subject am one with my body, then I have to take account of the fact that my body is an interchange with the greater nature outside. Nature knows no fixed boundaries at the limits of the body, and hence I as subject must be in interchange with this greater nature. (pp. 24-25)

Even though he eschewed the absolute idealism of Hegel which viewed humans as finite vehicles of infinite Spirit, Dewey (1929a) did see humans as that part of nature which is conscious of itself and as such was responsible for guiding and directing the development of nature:

> A true wisdom, devoted to [an opening and enlarging of the ways of nature in humanity] discovers in thoughtful observation and experiment the method of administering the unfinished processes of existence so that frail goods shall be substantiated, secure goods be extended, and the precarious promises of good that haunt experienced things be more liberally fulfilled. (p. 66)

How Does One Educate for a Love of Wisdom?

For Dewey, philosophy and education were of one piece. Philosophy was "the theory of education in its most general phases" (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 331). Dewey equated education with growth: It meant learning through and from experience in such a way that growth in one direction promoted growth in general. A school was an educational institution only insofar as it created "desire for continued growth" and supplied "means for making the desire effective in fact" (p. 53). Love of wisdom is naturally educative: It is devoted to opening up and enlarging avenues of experience because it desires to forecast as many consequences of an action as it is possible to foresee. Developing the metahabit of wisdom meant growing in the ability to predict consequences along a broader and deeper network of physical and social connections and to choose a course of action which advanced interests held in common.

Over the last 150 years, the establishment of common schools with compulsory attendance for children has encouraged the misperception that education and schooling are necessarily synonymous. Like many reformers before and after him, Dewey (1899,1902/1990) was concerned that schools tended to ignore the educative tendencies of living experience:

> In critical moments we all realize that the only discipline that stands by us, the only training that becomes intuition, is that got through life itself. That we learn from experience, and the books and the sayings of others *only* as they are related to experience, are not mere phrases. But the school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, that the place where children are sent for discipline is the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience – the mother of all discipline worth the name. (p. 17)

Schools were failing to educate because they did not take advantage of a child's natural "impulses and tendencies to make, to do, to create, to produce, whether in the form of utility or of art" (Dewey, p. 26).

Pointing to his own experimental school at the University of Chicago, Dewey (1899, 1902/1990) wanted

> to make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious. (p. 29)

Dewey saw schools as potential pivots for creating a more democratic society because if children could participate in the greatest of human goods–shared experience continually reconstructed by intelligent deliberation–in their own classrooms, then they would be

furnished with a shared stimulus–an inspiring ideal–to improve society now and in the future.

Although Dewey wrote much about education that remains fresh and invigorating to this day, he would not prescribe a hands-on method like Montessori or use symbolic gifts like Froebel. Although this made his educational philosophy more difficult to brand and set apart from other progressive educators, he would not compromise his respect for the heterogeneity of experience. For example, *The School and Society* (1899, 1902/1990) leaves the reader wanting to know more concrete details about Dewey's laboratory school: How does a curriculum built around occupations actually work? Instead, the reader is forced to think through the principles he advocates and to apply them to his or her own school. This was (and is) a difficult task requiring patient attention from teachers who can easily and erroneously read a child-centered approach into his ideas.

What were these principles, and how did they connect with Dewey's love of wisdom? His major works on education exhibit a unity and a progressive development around his notion of experience. *The School and Society* (1899/1990) connects the educative role of experience with the curriculum of an experimental school. *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966) fleshes out his ideas in a much more systematic and logical way. Covering a broad range of topics all connected to education, Dewey takes the reader along a coherent course that is rich with memorable sayings that resonate with anyone who has spent time in schools. The following samples whet the appetite: "To be the recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience" (p. 5); "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment" (p. 18); "Few grown-

up persons retain all of the flexible and sensitive ability of children to vibrate sympathetically with the attitudes and doings of those about them" (p. 43); "Wisdom has never lost its association with the proper direction of life. Only in education, never in the life of farmer, sailor, merchant, physician, or laboratory experimenter, does knowledge mean primarily a store of information aloof from doing" (p. 185).

However, the key to understanding how to educate for love of experiential wisdom is most succinctly formulated by Dewey in *Experience and Education* (1938/1963). Coming out after he had analyzed the psychology of habit (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922), had revised his moral theory (*Ethics*, Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989), had studied the metaphysics of experience (*Experience and Nature,* 1929a), and had examined experience from an aesthetic perspective (*Art As Experience*, 1934/1979), this little volume clarifies and distills his previous ideas on education while at the same time makes more explicit "the organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 25).

Continuity in Experience

According to Dewey (1938/1963), there are two criteria that can be distinguished in thought but always operate together in experience: *continuity* and *interaction.* Out of these two criteria a number of principles follow which can aid an educator who wishes to cultivate a love of wisdom. *Continuity* is another term for the way habit functions in the reconstruction of experience: Every experience "enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences" (p. 35). Using wisdom based on a greater maturity of

experience than that possessed by students, the educator must intentionally select "the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p. 28). How can such an experience be identified? An educative experience "arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future" (p. 38).

Interaction in Experience

To guide the educator in selecting activities that are potentially educative, he or she must attend to two things which *interact* in any experience: first, the attitudes, dispositions, and habitual tendencies of the student (the subjective side) and second, the conditions in the environment which are potentially conducive to growth (the objective side). The art of education involves allowing the subjective and objective sides of an experience to interact in such a way that students are engaged in solving a problem which engages their interest and challenges them to reconstruct their habits. If a teacher ignores the subjective side–as was often the case in "traditional"education where students were considered blank slates–she will be imposing a curriculum that may make no sense to many students: Education becomes regurgitation. If the teacher ignores her responsibility in regulating the objective side (since education only occurs indirectly through the environment), the students' native impulses may be indulged rather than reconstructed: Education becomes "free" expression. In this regard, Dewey (1938/1963) was firmly opposed to a child-centered education:

> Every theory which assumes that importance can be attached to these objective factors only at the expense of imposing external control and of limiting the

> freedom of individuals rests finally upon the notion that experience is truly experience only when objective conditions are subordinated to what goes on within the individuals having the experience. (p. 41)

A child-centered approach often equates freedom with the unimpeded expression of impulses and hence opposes freedom to control. A person who is at the mercy of her uncontrolled impulses is actually "under the control of accidental circumstances" (p. 64). Freedom really means self-control, which can begin only if an impulse is impeded so that intelligent deliberation may ensue. Freedom is "power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation" (p. 64).

Educating for a Love of Wisdom

In our examination of Dewey's notion of habit (above), we saw how experiential wisdom begins with self-control–a right ordering of desires achieved through deliberation about possible consequences of action. It is a temperance from which the virtue of wisdom emerges:

> Natural impulse and desires constitute in any case the starting point. But there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves. This remaking involves inhibition of impulse in its first estate. The alternative to externally imposed inhibition is inhibition through an individual's own reflection and judgment . . . . thinking is stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies

> to action so that a more comprehensive and coherent plan of action is formed. (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 64)

An individual student's self-control is not created *ex nihilo*: it is developed and strengthened by an objective control "which is effected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are co-operative or interacting parts" (p. 53).

The "whole situation" includes primarily two elements which interact to furnish control: first, the parameters which define a task and furnish an interest (solving a problem, conducting an experiment, analyzing a reading, composing a poem, researching an event, dribbling a soccer ball, drawing a map, building a stool, preparing a meal, tending a garden, etc.) and second, the parameters which define social interaction. Here Dewey brings in the democratic factor which is so crucial to his educational theory. The educator is like a referee who enforces the rules of the game to which all agree. Like a good referee who knows when to step in to call a foul and when to let them play, an educator acts on behalf of the whole group to ensure a truly educative experience for all.

It calls for educators who have a sympathetic regard for their students; who challenge them through activities which engage their thinking; who know how to use available resources in the immediate environment; who allow their own desires to be constantly reconstructed in experience; and who are willing to reflect in and on experience and to intelligently consider and reconsider various courses of action. In short, they are enthusiastic lovers of wisdom who practise what they preach. In the next chapter, we follow the footsteps of one such enthusiastic lover of wisdom, Simone Weil.

CHAPTER THREE: SIMONE WEIL AND THE LOVE OF WISDOM

In this chapter, we will follow the same sequence as in the previous one. A selection of Simone Weil's writings will be analyzed to examine her answers to the following questions: What is wisdom? How is wisdom connected to experience? How does one educate for a love of wisdom? Before embarking on this task, Weil's life will be reviewed briefly. I draw on four sources for this biographical sketch: Cabaud (1964), Fiori (1981/1989), McLellan (1990), and Pétrement (1973/1976). As noted in the previous chapter in regard to Dewey, the purpose of this short biography is to provide the reader with a context within which to better understand and assess her ideas, not to "psychologize" them, and certainly not to provide ammunition for *ad hominem* attacks.

Biographical Sketch

Simone Weil was born in Paris, France on 3 February 1909. Her father was a well-to-do physician who served as a medical officer in the First World War. Her mother came from a prosperous family with musical talent. Simone was the younger of two children born to the Weils: her brother, André, was her closest companion growing up and taught Simone how to read. The Weils were secularized Jews who encouraged their children to think for themselves.

The First World War interrupted Simone's early schooling–her family followed Dr. Weil from posting to posting in much the same way that Dewey's family followed his father around during the Civil War. By 1920 the Weils had settled down again in Paris, and Simone began attending school more regularly. In 1925 she entered Lyceé Henri IV[20]

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[20] The type of education she received here would be roughly equivalent to what a North American student would receive in pursuing a Bachelor of Arts. Later on, Weil taught in a number of *lycées*, somewhat like high schools that prepare students for university.

and studied philosophy for 3 years with a teacher who would exert a powerful influence on her intellectual development: Emile-Auguste Chartier, who was more often called by his pen name, Alain.

Scorning outlines, summaries, and systems, Alain often conducted his classes by responding to a reading chosen by a student. He believed that a thinker was best judged by the way he or she tackled specific problems (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 30). Reading involved thinking along with great writers without taking notes: to read and reread until the writer was understood (Fiori, 1981/1989, pp. 33-34). Clear thinking and good writing were interdependent. Each student was encouraged to write for 2 hours a day in beautiful handwriting without making corrections. While in his class, Weil took pains to improve her handwriting (she was not naturally dextrous) and strove to maintain a neat script to the very end of her life. If word processors had been available, it is probably safe to assume that Alain would have rejected typed assignments. If a student wanted to make revisions, she had only two choices: either leave what had been written or begin all over again (Cabaud, 1964, p. 27). The impact of this teaching is evident in the manuscripts that Weil left behind.[21]

Alain particularly admired Plato, Descartes, and Kant. According to a former

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[21] The way she qualified her arguments demonstrates Alain's instruction for writing. Modifications and clarifications often followed dubious assertions, as if she were clarifying her conceptions "on the fly" as one does in extemporaneous speech. In the following example, the second statement corrects the impression created by the first:

> It is the part played by joy in our studies that makes of them a preparation for the spiritual life, for desire towards God is the only power capable of raising the soul. Or rather, it is God alone who comes down and possesses the soul, but desire alone draws God down. (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 71)

student, "one of his most energetic denials was that of the idea of progress in philosophy. He thought that Plato not only had been left behind but was far ahead of us" (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 33). Alain's philosophical stance greatly affected Weil, who began her intellectual journey with Descartes and ended with Plato.

While attending Lycée Henri IV, Weil developed an interest in pacifism and working-class education. Along with many of Alain's students, she taught courses on weekends to railway workers and became increasingly active in trade union politics. Although she never joined the Communist party, her attraction to Marxism grew naturally out of a long-standing desire to identify with common laborers–especially with those whom she felt were being exploited and oppressed.[22] She admired people such as Léon Letellier,[23] the father of one of her classmates, who had combined intellectual pursuits with manual labor. In the summer of 1927, she made copies of his writings while working on his farm in Normandy (Fiori, 1981/1989, p. 49).

Between 1928 and 1931, she attended the École Normale Supérieure–an elite school that prepared students for teaching positions in the upper *lycées* and universities.[24]

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[22] For example, the summer before entering Lycée Henri IV, 15-year-old Simone had befriended some of the employees of the hotel in which her family was staying. To the dismay of the other guests, she encouraged them to form a union (Pétrement, 1973/1976, pp. 23-24).

[23] Born in the same year as John Dewey, Léon Letellier (1859-1926) was attracted to the ocean. At the age of 18, he joined a crew that fished the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. He later traveled the world as a seaman on ocean liners. At age 30, he entered university as a mature student and, soon after graduating, he settled down to farm in his native Normandy (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 46).

[24] In the entrance examinations for this elite school, two women had the highest scores: Simone Weil placed first, and Simone de Beauvoir placed second.

Writing a short dissertation was one of the requirements for graduation. In the first part of her dissertation, "Science and Perception in Descartes," (Weil, 1987, pp. 31-88), Weil raised scholarly objections to the conventional view that this founder of modern science created a coherent system which elevated abstract reasoning to such a degree that its connection to concrete experience was obscured. In fact, Weil's assessment leads one to believe that Descartes would have appreciated Dewey's laboratory school:

> Cartesian science is far more packed with matter than is ordinarily thought . . . . It is so bound to the imagination, so joined to the human body, so close to the most common labors, that one may be initiated into it by studying the easiest and simplest crafts. (Weil, 1987, p. 51)

In the second part of the dissertation, Weil took her own Cartesian journey of doubt "without believing in anything except one's own thought insofar as it is clear and distinct, and without trusting the authority of anyone, even Descartes, in the least" (p. 54). Her conclusion sheds a different light on Descartes's famous maxim by connecting thinking and existing to working:

> The pilot who holds the tiller in a storm, the peasant who swings his scythe, knows himself and knows the world in the way meant by the statement "I think, therefore I am" and the ideas that follow from it. Workers know everything; however, when their work is done, they do not know that they had all wisdom in their possession. (p. 85)

Weil rarely (if ever) consulted her supervisor. He disagreed with her reading of Descartes and gave her the lowest possible passing mark (McLellan, 1990, p. 29). Undaunted, Weil

spent most of the 1930-1931 school year preparing for the final examinations. This year also marked the onset of painful headaches which would plague her for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, she passed her examinations and became eligible for a teaching post.

Simone Weil believed that wisdom could be found in hands-on work, and she considered testing this hypothesis by joining the industrial workforce. However, since unemployment among factory workers was rising (the depression was in full swing), she accepted a position to teach philosophy at a girl's *lycée* in Le Puy, a town in southern France. In addition, she maintained contact with trade unions and taught courses in French and political economy on the weekends to miners in St. Etienne, a 3-hour train ride from her apartment in Le Puy. She saw working-class education as one of the conditions necessary for a true revolution. As she wrote in an article published in a trade-union newspaper in 1931:

> The important thing is to distinguish, among attempts at working-class culture, those that are conducted in such a way as to strengthen the ascendancy of the intellectuals over the workers, and those conducted in such a way as to free the workers from this domination. (Weil cited in Pétrement, 1973/1976, pp. 87-88)

She scandalized the residents of Le Puy by associating with unemployed workers and supporting them in seeking help from the municipal authorities. In addition, it seemed that her teaching had failed: only 7 of the 14 pupils she taught in Le Puy took the *baccalauréat* examinations, and of these only 2 passed. Earlier in the year, one school inspector had predicted this, even though he had been impressed by what her students were learning when he observed a class (Cabaud, 1964, p. 57). Nevertheless, her students

loved her: She put her time and resources at their disposal by offering extra courses free-of-charge in Latin and on the history of mathematics. A young worker from St. Etienne whom she had tutored in elementary geometry gushed: "With you as a teacher I was never bored for a second" (cited in Pétrement, pp. 98-99, 124).

Weil spent one month in the summer of 1932 visiting Germany with a view towards understanding the political situation there, in particular the state of the German working class. Upon returning to France, she wrote a series of 10 articles on Germany for *L'Ecole émancipée*, a publication of the teachers' trade union (Weil, 1987, pp. 97-147). She was disappointed by the weakness of the German Communist party, and she partly blamed this on a leadership that took its orders from the Soviet Union. As she began to reassess Marxist theory,[25] her views were attacked. When she attempted to speak at rallies, she was shouted down; she was forcibly prevented from distributing pamphlets. Her worker friends protected her from physical assault.

For the next two academic years, she taught at two different lycées–Auxerre in 1932/1933 (where her teaching was not as well received) and Roanne in 1933/1934. She continued her involvement in trade unions, joining them in their marches and rallies, writing articles in various left-wing journals, and teaching courses to workers on

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[25] Some of her political writings of this time are collected in *Oppression and Liberty* (Weil, 1955/1958). Using a Marxist framework while at the same time criticizing it, she argued that the machinery of oppression always accompanied the evolution of a society when it reached a certain level of economic development. The analogy she used to describe Europe of the 1930s could have been used by Homer-Dixon (2000) in his more recent analysis of our world: "On the whole, our present situation more or less resembles that of a party of absolutely ignorant travellers who find themselves in a motor-car launched at full speed and driverless across broken country" (Weil, 1955/1958, p. 121).

weekends in St. Etienne. In December of 1933, she met the exiled Léon Trotsky in Paris and had a long argument with him that revolved around the issue of whether the Soviet Union was a workers' state in transition (Trotsky's position) or whether it was another form of ineluctable oppression (Weil's position).[26]

Having long had the desire to better understand the conditions under which industrial workers lived, Weil took a leave from teaching to work in a Paris factory. Between December of 1934 and April of 1935, she worked as a power-press operator for a company that built electrical machinery. It seems that she quit after being injured on the work site. A few days later, she got a job operating a stamping press in another firm. She was fired after a month–probably because she couldn't produce fast enough. She spent the month of May looking for work and finally found a job with Renault. There she operated a milling machine for 3 months. She quit for good in late August of 1935 only after she had met her goal: acquiring the ability to work in a factory without descending into a state of indifference.[27] Soon after, mentally fatigued and physically exhausted, she accompanied her parents on a vacation to Portugal for the remainder of that summer. It was in a Portuguese fishing village, while viewing a candlelight procession of women

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[26] According to her friend and biographer, Simone Pétrement (1973/1976, p. 188), Weil always remained calm and composed during a discussion. The shouts that others heard from an adjoining room were most likely from Trotsky, who asked her: "If that's how you think, why did you put us up? Do you belong to the Salvation Army?"

[27] As Weil (1936/1965a) wrote in a letter the following year:

> I swore to myself that I would not give up until I had learned how to live a worker's life without losing my sense of human dignity. And I kept my word. But up to the last day I found it was necessary to renew the struggle every day to keep that sense, because the conditions of life never ceased to undermine it and to encourage a state of subhuman apathy. (p. 30)

touring the fishing boats of their husbands, that Weil became aware of her attraction to Christianity: "There the conviction was suddenly borne in upon me that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others" (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 34).

In the fall of 1935, she resumed teaching philosophy at a girls' lycée, this time in Bourges. The factory experience influenced her teaching: She began using literary works more and more in her efforts to ground philosophy in concrete situations for her students, speaking often about affliction and humiliation. In a shift that reminds one of Dewey, McLellan (1990) reports that she concentrated "more on psychology and ethics than on metaphysics" (p. 110). The factory experience also oriented her extracurricular activities: Weil began a dialogue with the manager of a nearby company that manufactured stoves. Over the course of the winter and spring, she tried to convince the manager to increase worker participation in workplace decision-making. She was disappointed to find that even a well-meaning manager was not willing to take that sort of risk (Weil, 1936/1965a).

In the summer of 1936, she joined a militia to fight on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War. After 2 months, she returned to France as a result of an accident in which her leg was badly burned. She again requested leave from her teaching and took the opportunity to visit Italy in the spring and summer of 1937. In the fall, she resumed her teaching duties at a girls' lycée at Saint-Quentin. However, her headaches became so intolerable that she had to quit in mid-year. She would never again have a paid teaching position (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 322).

Drawn to Catholic liturgy (she especially loved Gregorian chant), she attended the services at Solesmes in the week prior to Easter in 1938. By concentrating very hard on the words and music, she was able to rise above the pain of her splitting headaches. A fellow worshipper introduced her to the English "metaphysical" poetry of the 17th century. She was so taken by one of George Herbert's poems (*Love*) that she memorized it, reciting it with all of her attention whenever a headache became unbearable. During one of these recitations, she had a mystical experience: "Christ himself came down and took possession of me" (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 35). From this point on, her thinking and writing became more explicitly religious while maintaining its focus on social and political problems.

From the time she left teaching until the German invasion of France in 1940, Simone Weil immersed herself in works of literature and history. According to Pétrement (1973/1976) her research was driven by a desire to seek "in past centuries for a perspective, a firm and correct standard by which to judge present-day events" (p. 345). For her, Hitler's Germany was a spiritual resurgence of ancient Rome.[28] She also read the Hebrew scriptures, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Following the lead of her brother who had taught in India, she learned Sanskrit. She participated in discussion groups and contributed articles to various journals.

With Paris on the verge of capitulating to German forces, she and her parents

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[28] She despised the Roman empire. In her view, it was infinitely far from the spiritual beauty of ancient Greece. In an article published that year Weil (1940/1962a) pulled no punches: "Everything that disgusts and also everything that shocks us in [Hitler's] methods is what he has in common with Rome" (p. 119).

travelled south through unoccupied France, eventually settling down in Marseilles. Barred from teaching by the anti-Jewish laws of the Vichy regime, Weil spent much of her time reading and writing. She became involved with an another journal (*Cahiers du Sud*) for which she wrote a number of articles under an anagrammatic pseudonym (Emile Novis). One article is a striking commentary on Homer's *Iliad* (Weil, 1940/1977c). She sought out Catholics, questioning them incessantly about church doctrine and about whether the church in good conscience could baptize a person who held heretical views.[29] Through her contact with a Dominican priest who was helping various refugees find work, she was taken on by a self-educated farmer in the late summer and autumn of 1941 to work in vineyards about 240 kilometres north of Marseilles. She had returned to the ardors of physical labour, complementing factory with field.

Soon after returning to Marseilles, she became active in the Resistance (McLellan, 1990, p. 79) with the hope of eventually joining the Free French in England. Since it seemed impossible to do so directly from Vichy France, she decided to try an indirect route by accompanying her parents, who had managed to acquire visas for New York. She hoped from there to make her way to London and join up with the Free French under General Charles de Gaulle. They left Marseilles in May of 1942, were detained for over 2 weeks in a North African refugee camp, eventually crossed the Atlantic, and finally arrived at New York in early July. During her 4-month stay in New York, she continued

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[29] During her 1942 sojourn in New York, she wrote a long letter to an American clergyman in which she enumerated 35 objections to church teaching. For example, she rejected a good portion of the Hebrew scriptures. In her view, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* was closer to the spirit of the gospels (Weil, 1951/1974a, p. 105).

to read and write; in particular, she researched folklore in the public libraries. Every day she attended Mass, and every Sunday she attended a Baptist church in Harlem (Cabaud, 1964, p. 276). She continued to debate various Catholics on theological matters. After much letter writing and pleading, she managed to convince her compatriots in England to employ her services.

Weil arrived in London in late November. Working for De Gaulle's government-in-exile, she was assigned the task of reviewing proposals that outlined how France might be governed after the war. She did much more than this: Beginning with a radical re-assessment of human rights and responsibilities, she ended up writing a book-length treatise which conceived of a society built around human needs: More than three-quarters of the book is an extended discussion on the need for roots (Weil, 1949/1952b). However, her ardent wish was to reenter France on some clandestine mission. The authorities adamantly refused to send her.

Eating very little and often working through the night, she eventually collapsed from exhaustion in April of 1943. She was admitted to a hospital with a diagnosis of tuberculosis. She refused to eat enough to regain her strength and fight her illness.[30] Exasperated, her physician ordered her removed after 3 months: Her bed was needed for more co-operative patients. She was transferred to a sanatorium on August 17. Although there is some question as to whether she deliberately starved herself–she seemed unable

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[30] Simone Weil was never a big eater to say the least. When the war began, she vowed never to eat more than what her compatriots in France were officially rationed. Would she rather die than break a vow? If she was anorexic, it had nothing to do with our notion of "body image."

to tolerate solid food–there is no doubt that her physical deterioration was accelerated by malnutrition. Simone Weil died on 24 August 1943 at the age of 34. Most of her work was published posthumously (Pétrement, 1973/1976, pp. 535-539).

What Is Wisdom?

Fiori (1981/1989) described Simone Weil as a "philosopher, in its proper sense of a 'lover of wisdom:' perhaps this is the only definition that we can hazard for a woman we cannot define or categorize in her private or public life" (p. 314). Weil had discovered "the key to a wisdom which can be applied to the daily life of every man on both the individual and social plane" (p. 309). In this section we will examine Fiori's claim by analyzing a selection of Weil's writings. Like Dewey, Weil never wrote a treatise on wisdom. As we analyze the few passages that allude to it, we will attempt to bring to the surface an implicit conception of wisdom that undergirded her work.

As we saw above, Simone Weil (1987) wrote of wisdom in her dissertation on Descartes for the École Normale Supérieure in 1929/1930:

> Not only does Descartes regard every mind, as soon as it makes a serious effort to think properly, as equal to the greatest genius, but he finds the human mind even in the most ordinary thinking. There is, in his eyes, a common wisdom – a wisdom that is to the mind what the eyes are to the body – much closer to authentic philosophy than is the kind of thinking that study produces, "since we see very often that those who have never worked hard at the study of letters judge things close at hand much more soundly and clearly than those who have been in constant attendance at schools." Thus Descartes' great precept for attaining

> wisdom is not to study excessively. (p. 53)

Here Descartes (as read by Weil) resonates with Sternberg (1998): Wisdom emerges from practical thinking which in turn rests on tacit knowledge born in concrete experience–knowing what to do in a particular situation without necessarily being able to articulate it in words.

Her belief that wisdom was potentially accessible to every individual, regardless of how well she might perform on an IQ test, probably had its origins in a crisis of despair that Weil experienced at age 14. Comparing herself to her exceptionally gifted brother,[31] she felt inferior and mediocre:

> After months of inward darkness, I suddenly had the everlasting conviction that no matter what human being, even though practically devoid of natural faculties, can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if only he longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention upon its attainment. (Weil, 1950/1959, pp. 30-31)

Here she employs the term "truth" instead of wisdom. These terms were closely connected in her thought. This becomes clear when we examine a passage written in the year she died. The conviction born in an adolescent crisis had become even stronger. Was she using hyperbole?

> A village idiot in the literal sense of the word, if he really loves truth, is infinitely superior to Aristotle in his thought, even though he never utters anything but

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[31] André Weil (1906-1998) is considered one of the finest mathematicians of the 20th century. In 1958 he joined the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, where he remained until his death.

> inarticulate murmurs. He is infinitely closer to Plato than Aristotle ever was. He has genius, while only the word talent applies to Aristotle. If a fairy offered to change his destiny for one resembling Aristotle's, he would be wise to refuse unhesitatingly. (Weil, 1950/1977b, p. 329)

As George Grant succinctly paraphrased it: "A village simpleton who truly loves his neighbor is wiser than Aristotle."[32] His summary softens her violent assault on conventional wisdom by shifting the emphasis from "really loves truth" to "truly loves one's neighbor." The second phrase is easier to accept in a postmodern age where the notion of truth has little prestige. One can imagine the possibility of loving or respecting a concrete individual, but what does it mean to love what seems to be a difficult-to-define abstraction? Whose truth are we talking about? Your truth? My truth? The truth of dead White European males? The truth of indigenous peoples? We will return to these questions.

The passage above also emphasized the deep chasm that separated Plato from Aristotle in Weil's (1951/1957) reading:

> Plato's wisdom is not a philosophy, a research for God by means of human reason. That research was carried out as well as it can be done by Aristotle. But the wisdom of Plato is nothing other than the orientation of the soul towards grace. (p. 85)

To sum up Weil's conception so far: Wisdom is the ability to make clear and

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[32] George Parkin Grant (1917-1988) was a Canadian political philosopher who trusted Weil implicitly. This quotation is based on my recollection of a lecture given by Grant in 1978.

sound judgments. It is available to every person regardless of their intellectual capacities. It is better developed in specific, concrete activities–especially physical labor–than in the more abstract activities associated with schooling. A love of truth is indispensable in cultivating the ability to judge soundly, and further, growth in wisdom was somehow associated with a certain "orientation of the soul."

How Is Wisdom Connected to Experience?

After her mystical experience in 1938, Weil increasingly oriented her thinking towards holding together what she was convinced were two opposing truths: the perfection of God (or the Good) and the misery of human beings. Although these assertions when held together often led to the atheism of a Voltaire or a Gordon Sinclair,[33] Weil saw the experience of suffering as a door through which divine wisdom could be perceived:

> It is human misery and not pleasure which contains the secret of divine wisdom. All pleasure-seeking is the search for an artificial paradise, an intoxication, or enlargement. But it gives us nothing except the experience that is vain. Only the contemplations of our limitations and our misery puts us on a higher plane. (Weil, 1947/1952a, p. 84)

How could she arrive at such a conclusion? To answer this question, we need to retrace

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[33] Gordon Sinclair (1900-1984) was a Canadian journalist and broadcaster. Much like Christopher Hitchens today, he was not afraid to express his atheism. He appeared as a regular panelist on the CBC television series *Front Page Challenge.* In one show, discussion focused on a natural disaster reported in the headlines. As I recollect, he asked a version of an old question: "How can a good God allow the suffering of innocent human beings?"

her thought as it coalesced around a belief which she had held before her mystical experiences and which deepened after them: Wisdom could be found in physical labor.

In the second part of her student dissertation, "Science and Perception in Descartes," Weil (1987) undertakes her own Cartesian journey of doubt which ends with locating the key of wisdom with "the pilot who holds the tiller in a storm, the peasant who swings his scythe" (p. 85). She begins with experience understood as the mixed feeling of pleasure and pain:

> For me the presence of the world is above all this mixed feeling. What the swimmer calls water is for him above all a feeling made up of the pleasure that comes from swimming and the pain induced by fatigue. (p. 55)

However, she cannot know the world through her feeling of it. In her feeling of the world, how can she separate what she brings to the feeling from what the world makes present to her?

> If the swimmer thinks that the ambiguous feeling that makes the water present to him is the effect, or mark, or image of a coolness, a transparency, a resistance that is not constituted by that very feeling, he is saying more than he knows. (p. 56)

Is knowledge possible then? If feeling is the only conduit through which she has contact with the world, how can she separate illusion from reality? The very fact that she poses these questions gives her the clue: She can question, she can doubt whether something is real or not: "The power that I exercise over my own belief is not an illusion; it is through this power that I know that I think . . . . I have power, therefore I am [Je puis, donc je suis]" (p. 59). Weil goes behind Descartes' maxim (I think, therefore I am) to retrieve the

power to act:

> My own existence as I feel it is an illusion; but my existence as I know it is not a feeling but my creation. To exist, to think, to know are only aspects of a single reality: to be able to do something . . . . To know is to know what I can do; and I know to the degree that I substitute "to act" and "to be acted upon" for "to enjoy," "to suffer," "to feel," and "to imagine." In this way I transform illusion into certainty and chance into necessity. (p. 59)

Nevertheless, this power is very limited in scope:

> Does my will have any power over my enjoyment, my desire, my belief, or my anxiety if I want to get rid of them or change them? Not the slightest. All I can do is refuse my assent to what I believe or desire. (p. 67)

Is she then a complete plaything of her passions, like a sailor tied to her rigging, who helplessly watches her sailboat being tossed to and fro, refusing to give assent but powerless to do anything about it? No. Even though her power of judgment may be the only power she possesses, it gives her a handle on the world, a power that opens up a way to change it:

> However much the contents of my passions have a hold on me, to that extent they also allow me a grasp; and thus the world, although it does not depend on me, ceases to be something that exercises an inexplicable mastery over me. (p. 67)

Even though she cannot explain it, the power that refuses to give assent to her passions also acts on the world at the same time: It is based on a mysterious bond that exists between her and the world–"an ambiguous being that is a composite of myself and the

world acting on each other" (p. 69). Weil defined imagination as "this knot of action and reaction that attaches me to the world" (p. 70).

Wisdom in Work

The imagination can deceive her: What seems like a malevolent being menacing her along the bend of a road turns out to be a harmless tree. But it can also furnish the ideas–such as number and straight line motion–that do not dominate her imagination in the same way, since they are made present to her only by an act of her own attention (Weil, 1987, p. 72). Here Weil introduces one of the main themes of her thought, one that she will develop in her later writings with much greater precision: the act of attention which is somehow distinct from an act impelled by "passion" or emotion. The ideas which the imagination can furnish through an act of attention (e.g., geometry) give her the detachment whereby she can grasp the world,[34] whereas all other ideas (e.g., emotions) – which also arrive through the imagination–leave her attached to her passions and subject to the world. She is a split being: "Can I not attain perfect wisdom, wisdom in action, that would reunite the two parts of myself?" (p. 78). Yes, but not directly. She can unite them indirectly through work: "The two kinds of imagination, which are found separately in the emotions and in geometry, are united in the things I perceive. Perception is geometry taking as it were possession of the passions themselves, by means of work" (p.

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[34] How can geometry provide the detachment whereby one can grasp the world? Weil (1941/1968a) explains elsewhere: "All tools are instruments for ordering sensible phenomena, for combining them in definite systems; and in handling them men always think of the straight line, the angle, the circle, and the plane" (p. 39). Yet, "when thinking geometrically we always think that the straight line is something pure, a work of the mind, and outside the world of appearances" (p. 36).

79).

How is work connected to perception? In the early evening, two men are walking beside a pear orchard recently harvested. One has spent the day picking pears and is making ready to go home. The other is a tourist who has never picked fruit. The laborer perceives the orchard differently from the tourist because the former's perception has been deepened and disciplined by a more-or-less strenuous physical contact endured over a sustained period of time. Weil considered this to be a truer perception because it was fashioned by a more genuine contact with reality.

Why is work the key to wisdom? Why is it not wise to pursue a life of leisure? To accept Weil's (1955/1958) answer to these questions, one must assume (as Dewey did) that it is not good to be dominated by unbridled passions or emotions. Her words evoke Plato's description of the "despotic" soul (Cornford, 1945, pp. 287-301):

> An existence from which the very notion of work had pretty well disappeared would be delivered over to the play of the passions and perhaps to madness; there is no self-mastery without discipline, and there is no other source of discipline for man than the effort demanded in overcoming obstacles. A nation of idlers might well amuse itself by giving itself obstacles to overcome, exercise itself in the sciences, in the arts, in games; but the efforts that are the result of pure whim do not form for a man a means of controlling his own whims. (Weil, p. 84)

The curse of work is really a blessing in disguise, for it protects us from ourselves:

> Even if man were to cease being subjected to material things and to his fellows by needs and dangers, he would only be more completely delivered into their hands

> by the emotions which would stir him continually to the depths of his soul, and against which no regular occupation would any longer protect him. (p. 85)

If work performed this protective function, why did it so often feel like a curse? Was there a virtue in passively accepting the often boring routine of a job? No. The question for Weil was not how to eliminate work, but how to make work less oppressive and more vital. In order for this to happen, work had to become more intelligent, that is, it had to keep thinking connected to acting. To the greatest extent possible, each worker had to have a share in thinking through the problems of production. In other words, when work involved the ongoing challenge of thinking, it became an educational experience in Dewey's sense:

> The difficulties to be overcome would have to be so varied that it would never be possible to apply ready-made rules; not of course that the part played by acquired knowledge should be nil; but it is necessary that the worker should be obliged always to bear in mind the guiding principle behind the work in hand, so as to be able to apply it intelligently to ever new sets of circumstances. (p. 95)

Wisdom in factory work. In late 1934 Weil entered a Paris factory to experience industrial work first-hand–not as a social scientist sponsored by a funding agency for which she had to meet certain acceptable criteria, but as an anonymous, unskilled laborer who tried to make sense of her experience by keeping a private journal (Weil, 1987, pp. 155-226). She did not expect to find anything close to her ideal of mindful work; but what she actually did undergo was psychologically devastating, especially for someone who found it difficult to produce the minimum rate in a job that was paid by the piece

(e.g., stamping out washers or rivets). Along with calculations of how much she produced on a daily basis, her journal is a detailed record of her work activities accompanied with the odd diagram. Punctuated by moments that temporarily lifted her spirits–the relative fun of riveting, the joke of a fellow worker, a sympathetic smile, a short session in a happy workshop–her experience was physically exhausting, crushingly painful (particularly during her headaches), and mentally numbing. Thinking was the hardest thing to do. She was an appendage to a machine. Leaving work one day, she sat down fatigued beside the Seine River and contemplated her wretched situation: "I wonder if, in the event that I were condemned to live this life, I would be able to cross the Seine every day without someday throwing myself in" (p. 204). Through this ordeal, she realized that self-respect was largely a social construction and that a sense of self-worth was almost completely dependent on one's circumstances. Nevertheless, she retained her affection and respect for her fellow workers, in whom she "always found that generosity of heart and aptitude for general ideas were directly proportional to each other" (p. 226).

Seven years later she published an article on this experience. Even though her work experience was almost entirely negative, she was still hopeful that factory life could be brought closer to her ideal of mindful work: "The factory ought to be a place where, for all the inevitability of physical and spiritual travail, working people can taste joy and nourish themselves on it" (Weil, 1942/1977a, p.66). The joy of work should furnish the primary incentive, with the paycheck furnishing a secondary one. For this to happen, workers must not only understand how their work contributes to the manufacture of the end product, they should have a part to play in the planning of the work. This accords

with the value she placed in mindful work prior to her factory experience:

> It is not in relation to what it produces that manual labour must become the highest value, but in relation to the man who performs it; it must not be made the object of honours and rewards, but must constitute for each human being what he is most essentially in need of if his life is to take on of itself a meaning and a value in his own eyes. (Weil, 1955/1958, p. 104)

A society would experience wisdom to the degree in which it gave manual labor a pivotal place. With the possible exception of "primitive" groups such as Amish Mennonites, does recorded history offer us any examples of such societies? Even ancient Greece, the civilization she most admired, did not appreciate the value of physical work, to say the least. In the modern world, the value of labor is calculated in monetary units: This debased view is so powerful that few union leaders have the ability or the desire to transcend it:

> Suppose the devil were bargaining for the soul of some poor wretch and someone, moved by pity, should step in and say to the devil: "It is a shame for you to bid so low; the commodity is worth at least twice as much." Such is the sinister farce which has been played by the working-class movement, its trade unions, its political parties, its leftist intellectuals. (Weil, 1950/1977b, p. 323)

Physical labor was equal in value to art and science:

> To take a youth who has a vocation for this kind of work and employ him at a conveyor belt or as a piece-work machinist is no less a crime that to put out the eyes of the young Watteau and make him turn a grindstone. But the painter's

vocation can be discerned and the other cannot. (Weil, 1950/1977b, p. 322)

In writing about how French industry could be reorganized after the war in *The Need for Roots* (Weil, 1949/1952b), she raised what she believed was the essential idea around which factories should be restructured, that "of posing in technical terms problems concerning the effect of machines upon the moral well-being of the workers" (p. 58). In addition, she offered a number of specific proposals. First, apprenticeship programs should be set up in such a way that apprentices could move about the country in a "tour de France," imbibing regional traditions as they learned their trade. Second, the workers needed to increase their freedom and responsibility: "A workman or group of workmen could have a certain number of orders to fill within a given time, and be left with a completely free hand in the actual layout of the work" (p. 60). Her final proposals anticipated Schumacher's (1973) *Small Is Beautiful*: Large, centralized firms should be broken up and dispersed throughout the countryside, and corporations which divided ownership and management through stockholding should be abolished and declared illegal (p. 77).

Wisdom in field work. Although Weil had tasted little joy in the factory, she seemed to have feasted on it in the field. During harvest season in 1941, she worked 8-hour days picking grapes in southern France. The physical exhaustion in the field was no less than in the factory, but its psychological impact on her was qualitatively different. Pétrement (1973/1976) quotes from one of her letters of this period:

> The tiredness is a tiredness that is healthy for the soul, which puts me into more complete contact with nature, and in the depths of which one finds profound joys.

> . . . Sometimes I am crushed by fatigue, but I find in it a kind of purification. Right at the bottom of my exhaustion I encounter joys that nothing else could give me. (pp. 440, 441)

Weil's description resonates deeply with my own experience working on a fruit farm. However, the purifying joys of physical labor were not what initially drew me to the farm at the age of 9; it was the opportunity to drive a tractor. Even though I was paid little or no money, I sensed that driving a tractor was not just a favor that my father (with the tacit permission of the owners) extended to a bored kid: I had a contribution to make. During harvest season, I drove the tractor in a stop-and-go fashion through orchards and vineyards while my father and his coworker loaded up the trailer with baskets of Blue Delicious plums or Concord grapes or bushels of Bartlett pears. I saved them the extra effort of getting on and off the tractor during stops.

So began my first of 18 consecutive seasons of work on a fruit farm. I did not want to return to school in September. Some days I would look out of the grade 5 classroom window and, with a lump in my throat, see my father loading up grapes at the end of a vineyard. Each day at half past 3, I would tear out of the building and run the quarter mile from school to farm, joining my father until suppertime. Each autumn Saturday from 7 in the morning until 6 in the evening, I would pick fruit in the field or help grade and pack it in the barn or– my favorite–haul trailers fully laden with fruit from field to barn. When my father could no longer work because of debilitating arthritis, the owners of the fruit farm invited me to work from May through August–the summer break for university students.

It was during the first full summer of farm work that I experienced the joys of arduous labor. Using a long-handled shovel, I had to cut down weeds missed by a tractor-drawn disc-harrow. This meant going around the trunk of every tree through approximately 100 acres of pear, plum, cherry, and peach orchards. When blisters began to form on my palms, I felt envy for a more senior coworker who sat on a tractor all day. How was I going to make it through 2 exhausting weeks of 10-hour days working by myself?

As my blisters changed into callouses and my muscles firmed up, the ceaseless rhythm of my swinging shovel brought me to a state in which I paid attention to ordinary things. The changing position of the sun, the rustling of leaves, the sweet scent of grape blossom, the variations in temperature, the perspiration rolling off my forehead, the pain in my back–these were all savored and endured as I thought along with Weil: "Only those possess nature and the land who have been penetrated by it through the daily suffering of their limbs broken by fatigue" (cited in Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 444). I was alive! The idea of sitting on a tractor began to lose its hold on me. The stench of diesel exhaust and the steady roar of the engine seemed more and more repugnant. My perception had changed.

For Weil (1952-1955/1956), "joy is the fullness of the sentiment of the real" (p. 222). It was the "feeling of reality" (p. 266). Aside from working outside in fresh air among growing things, what made the field more conducive than the factory for finding joy in work? First, a farm worker could more easily understand how his or her labor fit within the general scheme of things–a scheme in which planting, cultivating, and

harvesting followed a regular seasonal pattern. As a result, the orders given by a field boss or vineyard owner would often seem less capricious than those given by a factory foreman. Second, the farmhand would bump up against the physical demands of work–making contact with conditions imposed from without–in a qualitatively different way than a factory worker. In Weil's view, the obstacles or contradictions experienced through work put one into contact with reality, the manifest appearance of which constituted beauty (p. 387). Was it because of a closer proximity to nature less modified by human artifice that the farmhand could experience these impositions in a way that more easily opened up a possibility that beauty could be perceived in the order of the world?

The following example drawn from my own life may serve to illustrate this qualitative difference. I spent only one day working in a factory. This occurred as a result of a request made by an industrial supervisor with whom I was acquainted. He knew I was available on rainy days when there was no inside work to be done on the farm. His company specialized in moving heavy equipment, and on this particular day, I joined a crew that had to move a large press inside a factory which manufactured metal cans for soft drinks. The noise of the metal presses was deafening, and every worker wore ear protection. Machine operators spent their whole day executing a series of repetitive motions. Most of my day was spent standing around waiting for a foreman to give instructions. This created within me an anxious boredom–I had nothing to do, but I had to be ready to follow orders at any moment. The exhaustion I felt at the end of the day had more to do with strained nerves and ringing ears than with physical work. The

hefty paycheck was not enough of a stimulus to lure me away from the farm.

Wisdom and the Order of the Universe

Physical work–a series of directed actions–brought one up against something that resisted one's efforts. The struggle with concrete obstacles–which Weil called necessity, "that which imposes conditions" (Weil, 1952-1955/1956, p. 217)–could teach a person about patterns and regularities which existed in the world quite apart from any patterns that one could imagine or impose upon it. Gouinlock (2004) expresses it succinctly: "The fisherman, hunter, farmer, and builder are instructed and called to account by the unsentimental course of events" (p. 94).

Paradoxically, it is through the use of tools–those extensions of our bodies–that we are able to master our bodies in work, a mastery built through habit, and thereby we develop a perception of necessary relations, a perception which lies at the heart of science. Caught in a violent storm at sea, a seasoned sailor realizes that

> The mind has to get away from desire and fear and apply itself solely to establishing an exact relationship between the movements imparted by the instruments and the objective aimed at . . . . The body, rendered as it were fluid through habit, to use Hegel's beautiful expression, simply causes the movements conceived in the mind to pass into the instruments. The attention is directed exclusively to the combinations formed by the movements of inert matter, and the idea of necessity appears in its purity, without any admixture of magic. (Weil, 1955/1958, pp. 90-91)

The attention paid to these patterns and regularities–the order of the world–could, in turn,

reveal a wisdom that also seemed to exist apart from one's own conceptions:

> We have everyday before us the example of a universe in which an infinite number of independent mechanical actions concur so as to produce an order that, in the midst of variations, remains fixed. Furthermore, we love the beauty of the world, because we sense behind it the presence of something akin to a wisdom we should like to possess to slake our thirst for the good. (Weil, 1949/1952b, p. 10)

Hence, for the Christian Platonist Weil, a scholar's true aim was the union of her "own mind with the mysterious wisdom eternally inscribed in the universe" (p. 262).

In the last section of *The Need for Roots*, Weil (1949/1952b) defended and elaborated this view of wisdom as she challenged Hitler's bold assertion that brute force was sovereign in the universe–an assertion implied by modern science. If force is supreme, then might is right, and it is absurd to believe that human beings can build a society on principles that are somehow not subject to the application of force:

> It is inconceivable that everything in the universe should be entirely subjected to the rule of force and that Man should be able to escape the effects of this, seeing that he is made of flesh and blood and that his mind wanders here and there at the mercy of sensory impressions. There is only one possible choice to be made. Either we must perceive at work in the universe, alongside force, a principle of a different kind, or else we must recognize force as being the unique and sovereign ruler over human relations also. (p. 241)

Weil was firmly convinced that there *was* another principle at work and that blind, indeterminate force was subject to and limited by an eternal and supernatural wisdom.

Again, since she was advocating a position that runs counter to Dewey's naturalism, her argument needs to be quoted at length. In reading it, one can see that her bold assertions are the product of reflecting on her experiences working in the factory and the field:

> The whole succession of events here below, made up, as they are, of variations in balance mutually compensated – births and destructions, waxings and wanings – render one keenly alive to the invisible presence of a plexus of limits without substance and yet harder than any diamond. That is why things are beautiful in their vicissitudes, although they allow one to perceive a pitiless necessity . . . . But the thought which really enraptured the ancients was this: what makes the blind forces of matter obedient is not another, stronger force; it is love. They believed that matter was obedient to eternal Wisdom by virtue of the love which causes it to consent to this obedience. Plato, in his *Timaeus*, says that divine Providence dominates necessity by exercising a wise form of persuasion over it. (p. 290)

What type of providence is this? It is certainly not one that comports easily with a conception held by many believers, that is, that God somehow intervenes selectively by disturbing the order of the world so as to protect some and leave others at the mercy of natural disasters. Weil attacked this conception root and branch. She often cited the gospel of Matthew in this regard: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."[35]

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[35] Matthew 5: 45 (Barker, 2002, p. 1477). The Hebrew scriptures contain a similar passage but without an explicit reference to God. See Ecclesiastes 9:11: "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (Barker, p. 1016).

Loving Wisdom

Has Weil made an unwarranted leap in her logic? How could pitiless necessity perfectly obey a love exercised without force? To follow her logic, we are invited to follow her experimental method – a method which seems to have more in common with Buddhist meditation than with either modern science or contemporary Christianity:

> The operation of the intellect in scientific study makes sovereign necessity over matter appear to the mind as a network of relations which are immaterial and without force. Necessity can only be perfectly conceived so long as such relations appear absolutely immaterial. They are then only present to the understanding as a result of a pure and lofty concentration emanating from a part of the mind not subjected to force.... So long as man submits to having his soul taken up with his own thought, his personal thoughts, he remains entirely subjected, even in his most secret thoughts, to the compulsion exercised by needs and to the mechanical play of forces. If he thinks otherwise, he is mistaken. But everything changes as soon as, by virtue of a positive act of concentration, he empties his soul so as to allow the conceptions of eternal Wisdom to enter into it. He then carries within himself the very conception to which force is subjected. (pp. 290-291)

This method is very difficult and requires a persevering faith that can withstand disappointment. How can I determine whether my thoughts are subjected to force or not? I must be relentlessly honest with myself, questioning motives constantly but without

sliding down the slippery slope of introspection.[36] This can best be achieved through two types of discipline: the discipline of dialectics in which ideas are tested in discussion with others, and the discipline of work in which actions are tested by the effects they have in an environment.

How can I produce "a pure and lofty concentration" unswayed by the pressure of needs? I must refuse primary allegiance either to the satisfaction or to the renunciation of my needs. I must strive to fulfill obligations without seeking or ignoring the good opinion of others. Through all this, I must wait patiently for wisdom to appear while rejecting all conceptions which fall short. It is like the young chess master who, not seeing that he is in a winning position, nevertheless remembers his teacher's advice: "Don't move until you see it" (Rudin, Horberg, & Zaillian, 1993).

Throughout Weil's writings, we find deposits of wisdom produced by the type of concentrated attention which she had practised and developed from early adolescence. The Cartesian journey of doubt undertaken in her minidissertation is probably her first sustained written attempt. Through the discipline of work–both physical and intellectual–she refined and developed this method until she hit a wall. This obstacle was the "affliction"[37] she experienced in factory work which, combined with her splitting headaches, made it almost impossible for her to concentrate. It was soon after this that

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[36] In the first lecture presented at the Roanne lycée in 1933, Weil (1959/1978) advised her students to avoid introspection because the object of study (oneself) always vanished (pp. 27-29).

[37] Affliction is the closest English equivalent to the French *malheur,* which Weil used to mean physical suffering combined with social degradation and a sense of inevitable doom.

she became aware of a "conception of eternal Wisdom" which transformed her perception: What she had formerly regarded as the blind mechanism of necessity and chance was still contemplated as such, with none of the bitterness removed; except now it was bathed in a light that revealed a perfect and beautiful obedience to a transcendent and sovereign Good. Caught in this net of necessary relations, human beings had freedom in only one sense: whether to consent to this obedience or not. However, from the perspective of experience, this consent was decisive:

> Where everything else is equal, a man does not perform the same actions if he gives his consent to obedience as if he does not; just as a plant, where everything else is equal, does not grow in the same way if it is in the light as if it is in the dark. The plant does not have any control or choice in the matter of its own growth. As for us, we are like plants which have the one choice of being in or out of the light. (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 88)

Loving wisdom-as-truth. For Weil, a lover of wisdom had to be a lover of truth. In fact, it would be hard to distinguish these terms in her writings. As noted above, they could be used interchangeably. Here we return to questions that we set aside above. Weil would probably welcome the fact that truth enjoys little prestige in our postmodern era, for prestige was, in her view, a corrupting influence. Truth for her was not an abstraction dependent on the quality of the mind that conceived it. Truth was contact with reality–reality in its fullness which existed quite apart from anyone's ability to speculate on it. She was a realist within the tradition of Plato: "To desire truth is to desire contact with a piece of reality" (Weil, 1949/1952b, p. 253).

Reality was not something one could possess; one could only be penetrated by it. Therefore, to ask "whose truth?" was to ask the wrong question. But, any culture could contain a piece of truth (in whatever language or idiom this was phrased) to the extent to which it was open to such penetration. Weil believed that the truth in Christianity was more or less present in all religions. In her notebooks, Weil (1956) drew parallels with the folklore and myths of a variety of religions and cultures including Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, ancient Greece, and ancient Egypt. However, she did not advocate syncretism. In her view, changing one's religion was "as dangerous a thing as a change of language is for a writer. It may turn out a success, but it can also have disastrous consequences" (Weil, 1951/1974a, p. 117). Neither did she advocate an uncritical acceptance of one's own religion; in fact, one must be willing to leave a religion if it is discovered to be false, even if this means becoming an atheist. For Weil (1947/1952a), atheism could be a type of purification: "Among those men in whom the supernatural part has not been awakened, the atheists are right and the believers wrong" (p. 104). Her ideas on religion and truth must be kept in mind as we turn to her position on the purpose of education.

How Does One Educate for Love of Wisdom-As-Truth?

Weil understood both poles of the teaching-learning dialectic. If one of her biographers is to be believed, then she was the ideal educator: "Since teaching meant for her a communication of wisdom . . . she found herself unable to resist 'any soul's need for instruction.'. . . her pedagogical gifts were such that she could have adapted any subject to any kind of mind" (Cabaud, 1964, p. 260). On the other hand, if one reads the

reports written by school officials, the reviews are mixed. At Auxerre, where she was least appreciated, one inspector wrote: "Certainly a distinguished mind but as a teacher she has no pedagogic sense" (cited in Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 169). Nevertheless, on the whole, she was loved by her students (Pétrement, p. 205).[38]

Except for a short article on teaching mathematics and a longer essay on developing attention in school studies, Weil left us nothing but a few fragmentary comments on education scattered throughout her writings. We will conclude this chapter by considering both selections.

During her first year of teaching (1931-1932), Weil (1932/1968b) wrote an article in which she reported on a "personal experiment in teaching" (p. 71). Sensing that her philosophy students at Le Puy were interested in the history of mathematics and that the required curriculum left no space for an extended discussion, she offered an optional course that each student decided to attend (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 98). The course outlined major mathematical ideas in chronological fashion, starting with the measurement of lengths and the development of theorems in ancient Greece and ending with the development of calculus in the 17th century. She interpreted this history as various attempts to solve the contradiction between continuous space and discrete number. In her judgment, the experiment was very successful, since everyone, even the

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[38]As lecturers both Dewey and Weil created bad first impressions. He spoke slowly with many pauses and seemed to ignore the class; she spoke without emotion and rarely looked at her students. Nevertheless, persevering students, initially catching only glimpses of what lay beneath the austerity of their styles, eventually encountered the rich substance of their thoughts. Both were at their best in small seminar-type classes. See Westbrook (1991, pp. 378 - 379) and Pétrement (1973/1977, pp. 169, 170, 181).

weakest math students, comprehended it enthusiastically: "They understood that mathematics is a product of human thought and not a collection of dogmas" (p. 73).

She concluded the article with suggestions on how to teach science in a way that combined thinking with acting. Although she does not explicitly state it, it is safe to assume that these suggestions are meant to be implemented with high school students or adult workers who took similar courses. First, each branch of science should be taught with an historical perspective in mind. Second, as far as possible, such study should involve the reading of primary sources in combination with the reproduction of original experiments. Finally, each student should develop a "productive technical skill" combined with an historical study that related the development of this skill to the development of science and technology in general (p. 74). As Weil (1987) had concluded in her dissertation on Descartes, science was best understood if a student, "following the same order he would follow if he were methodically making discoveries himself, may be said less to receive instruction than to teach himself" (p. 86). Like Dewey, Weil was critical of the prevailing methods of teaching science and wanted to make it more vital, more connected to the growing ability of a student to make sense of the world. As Dewey (1910/1985a) pointed out, laboratory exercises performed as illustrations of ideas presented in lectures or textbooks introduce students to the rituals of science, but they do not necessarily construct a scientific habit of mind, a habit that was built on the platform of common sense (pp. 75 - 77).

Ten years later, Weil (1950/1959, pp. 66-76) wrote an essay on the purpose of schooling for Father Perrin, the Dominican priest who had helped her find work in the

vineyards north of Marseilles and with whom she had discussed Catholic doctrine at great length in a spirit of friendship. In the spring of 1942, Father Perrin was assigned a position which put him in contact with Catholic students, and the former high school teacher wanted to give him her thoughts on how school studies could be put to the "right use."

The reader must bear in mind the audience to which this essay is addressed–a Catholic priest who would have had occasion to teach and counsel Catholic students. In light of the previous discussion, one could almost imagine her transposing this essay for a Buddhist elementary school teacher or a Hindu professor. A reader who has never prayed or who has rejected the religion in whose idiom Weil wrote might feel alienated or offended by this essay. Perhaps the following explanation could remove this difficulty.

Up until the late summer of 1941, Weil had assiduously avoided prayer in all its visible forms. Always alert to the possibility of self-deception, she feared the power of suggestion that lurked behind this religious practice. However, she could no longer avoid it after falling into a trap of her own making: Weil had volunteered to teach her farmer-employer Greek. During one of the sessions, she and her student agreed to memorize the Greek text of the Lord's Prayer. Since keeping a promise was a sacred duty to her, she felt obliged to do it. Weil (1950/1959) made herself recite it with absolute attention: "The infinite sweetness of this Greek text so took hold of me that for several days I could not stop myself from saying it over all the time" (p. 39). Looking back at her first mystical experience, she now concluded that the attentive recitation of Herbert's poem, *Love*, had the virtue of a prayer even though she did not know it at the time (p. 35).

Prayer was virtually identical to the method of sustained attention that she had practiced for years. It was *not* auto-suggestion. In auto-suggestion one developed the "power of positive thinking" which, in turn, produced a hopeful confidence and formed the basis of acting in ways that more or less produced successful outcomes. After I had a particularly dismal school year, a friend told me the following September to look at the mirror each morning and say to myself: "I can do it. I can do it." It worked! Although this was very similar to the psychological benefits that many people report having as a result of praying regularly, prayer in Weil's view was essentially different. Auto-suggestion was based on positive self-talk with a view to a desired outcome. Prayer-as-attention was based on listening to another without regard for any visible success.

In "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" Weil (1950/1959, pp. 66-76) argues implicitly that teachers who educate for love of wisdom-as-truth must help their students cultivate the faculty[39] of attention–to develop their ability to concentrate in a "pure and lofty" manner. Her first sentence enucleates the essay which follows: "The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention" (p. 66). For many Christians, prayer was (and is) seen as a prelude and postlude to work. Devout Christians pray for a blessing before work is begun and thank God for success after it is complete. Prayer is directed to God so that *work* becomes effective. For Protestants with a pragmatic bent, Weil's thesis is startling

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[39] Weil's use of this term brings to mind the faculty psychology of the 19th century which undergirded the traditional view of education and which had been discredited by the emerging science of psychology in the 20th century. In my reading of Weil, she tends to use this term in a more generic sense as a synonym for power, ability, or capacity.

because she emphasizes the reverse relationship. Work should be conducted in such a way that our *prayers* become effective:

> When we set out to do a piece of work, it is necessary to wish to do it correctly, because such a wish is indispensable if there is to be true effort. Underlying this immediate objective, however, our deep purpose should aim solely at increasing the power of attention with a view to prayer. (p. 69)

How could school studies be used to develop the power of attention? It meant tackling a math problem or a language assignment with all the effort that one could muster to find a solution or compose a poem without any regard for good grades as such. Even if such sustained effort of attention failed to produce a visible result, it would sooner or later have its effect in prayer. In addition, it might improve another ability in no way related to the original assignment. The seemingly vain attempt to solve a mathematical problem could one day enable the student "to grasp the beauty of a line of Racine more vividly on account of it" (Weil, 1959, pp. 67-68).[40]

In this sense, slow learners had a distinct advantage: They were forced to struggle longer and harder than their more gifted classmates. By Weil's calculation, the "slower" ones who disciplined themselves in this manner would one day experience the fruit of their work in exact proportion to the genuine effort expended. Weil points to the example of the Curé d'Ars (1786-1859), who found academic study extremely difficult and failed in his first attempt to pass the examinations necessary for entering seminary. Nevertheless, his ability to teach catechism and to counsel individuals became so well

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[40] Jean Baptiste Racine (1639 - 1699) was a French playwright.

known that up to 20,000 people a year came to see this parish priest in the final decade of his life (Otten, 2003). In Weil's estimation, the long and painful years he spent trying "to learn Latin bore fruit in the marvellous discernment which enabled him to see the very soul of his penitents behind their words and even their silences" (Weil, 1950/1959, pp. 68-69).

Students who truly paid attention would not only reap benefits in prayer or in another field of study–they would be better equipped to help those in affliction because they could give these sufferers the right kind of attention:

> It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labelled "unfortunate," but as a man, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way. This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this. (p. 75)

Weil distinguished attention from the type of muscular effort or expenditure of nervous energy that merely tires us. If one was tired, paying attention was very difficult. Twenty minutes of sustained study was often much more effective than 3 hours of staring at books without a break. Attention was also distinct from will power which, though essential in manual work, had no place in study per se: "The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work" (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 71). Will power could perhaps clear away obstacles that blocked the

growth of desire, but will power could not manufacture joy. Once the ground was cleared, all one could do was to pay attention with patient endurance: "Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it" (p. 72). How could one do this in school work?

> There is a way of giving our attention to the data of a problem in geometry without trying to find the solution, or to the words of a Latin or Greek text without trying to arrive at the meaning, a way of waiting, when we are writing, for the right word to come of itself at the end of our pen, while we merely reject all inadequate words. (p. 73)

Weil (1950/1959) wrote of two conditions that needed to be observed if we were to put school studies to the right use: First, as we have seen, each school task should be approached with the implicit aim of increasing the power of attention. Second, we need to pay careful attention to each assignment in which we have done poorly, "seeing how unpleasing and second-rate it is, without seeking any excuse or overlooking any mistake or any of our tutor's corrections, trying to get down to the origin of each fault" (p. 69).

Although not stated in her essay, it goes without saying that teachers who wished to educate students in this manner were themselves committed to developing the power of attention in their own lives and work. Teachers who looked at their own mistakes with a steady gaze were more likely to improve their pedagogical techniques. They would welcome being corrected by peers and students alike, thereby creating a classroom climate that cultivated a love of truth along with reducing the fear of making mistakes. To give a struggling student one's full attention was to give them the gift of

encouragement–even if one could not (at that moment) provide a concrete suggestion. They would live by Grant's maxim: "For those of you who wish to become teachers, always remember that there is at least one student in the class who is more intelligent than you are." [41]

In the next chapter, we bring the two lovers of wisdom together. The thought of John Dewey and Simone Weil will be compared in the hope that a clearer and more robust conception of wisdom will come into focus.

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[41] This is based on my recollection of a lecture given by George Grant in 1978.

CHAPTER FOUR: LOVING WISDOM WITH DEWEY AND WEIL

As far as we know, John Dewey and Simone Weil were unaware of each other. On Dewey's part this is perfectly understandable: Weil was a young French woman who lived in relative obscurity; Dewey died before Weil's writings would have been available in English. When meeting Dewey in North America, did Trotsky ever mention his argument with that infuriating young woman who sheltered him in Paris? Although a reference to William James can be found in her notebooks,[42] Weil never mentioned Dewey by name. It is tempting to imagine a chance meeting between Dewey and Weil during her 4-month sojourn in New York City. If the 33-year-old had been interested in American pragmatism, she might have tracked down the 83-year-old in the autumn of 1942. Nevertheless, apart from her keen desire to leave America for London as soon as she could, her main intellectual pursuits involved reading up on ancient folklore and finding Catholic priests who were willing to answer her reservations about receiving baptism.

In this chapter the views of John Dewey and Simone Weil on wisdom are compared. The comparison is structured around three questions: How is wisdom connected to experience from a psychological perspective? How is wisdom connected to the social dimension of experience? How is wisdom connected to nature? In the next chapter, the comparison of their views will form the basis of a discussion on how to educate for love of wisdom.

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[42] Weil (1950/1970) defined freedom–"when the thought of an action precedes the action" (p. 26)–in response to James's (1884) thesis that an action (I am running) preceded an emotion (I am afraid). To have the presence of mind to be aware of one's fear dissipated a knee-jerk panic reaction and allowed some freedom from, and mastery of, the emotion of fear.

How Is Wisdom Connected to Experience from a Psychological Perspective?

As noted in Chapter Two, it would be fair to say that Dewey considered wisdom to be a moral activity that constructed a moral self. It had its roots in the habitual transactions that humans forged with their environments. The moral self was a bundle of habits that were continually reconstructed as the self adapted to changing environments or responded to problematic transactions. Wisdom was the cord which held the bundle of habits together. Wisdom was a metahabit: a habit of habits. The habit of deliberation developed at the core of wise activity. It meant thinking before doing by rehearsing various courses of action in the mind before deciding on one. It meant learning from mistakes, learning from experience, and reconstructing habits. A teacher with wisdom derived from experience could visualize a classroom activity well enough to anticipate student responses to instructional directions. She could enter a classroom of new students and know how to read the situation, alert to signs of attention or inattention, careful not to jump to conclusions, but also willing to take appropriate action if the situation required it. To act wisely was to think before, during, and after acting–it was the habit of reflective practice, a habit which expressed her moral self-as-a-teacher and, at the same time, modified this same self as it was embodied through action.

Transactions with events in environments were central to Dewey's conception of the moral self, and of these transactions, the ones connected to other selves–the social dimension of experience–held the most value for "shared experience is the greatest of human goods" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 167). For the development of a moral self, the metahabit of wisdom continually took others into account so that a shared experience–the

democratic way of life–would enrich the lives of each one.

For Weil, it also would be fair to say that the roots of wisdom lay in transactions with an environment. It was difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a self separate from the transactions which defined it. The surrounding conditions were the backdrop that brought a self into relief, and without the environmental backdrop which sustained it, the self would disappear. The transactions were a composite of a self with its environment–each acting on the other (Weil, 1987, p. 69). Nevertheless, this composite self was divided, craving to be unified, to be whole, to have integrity:

> I am always a dual being, on the one hand a passive being who is subject to the world, and on the other an active being who has a grasp on it; . . . Can I not attain perfect wisdom, wisdom in action, that would reunite the two parts of myself? (p. 78)

Like Dewey, Weil saw wisdom developing through action. One's actions not only revealed the degree to which one possessed wisdom as a force that unified the self–that tied the habits together–these actions created that very self. Weil (1987) was emphatic about it: "My existence as I know it is not a feeling but my creation" (p. 59). Activity which exhibited a grasp on the world might look passive to someone looking from the outside, just as passivity which exhibited the world's grasp on the self might appear as activity to the same observer. The colloquial term "acting out" denotes such a passive state where anarchic desires are given "free" reign. As Dewey (1938/1963) made clear, such a person's conduct is

> dictated by immediate whim and caprice; that is, at the mercy of impulses into

> whose formation intelligent judgment has not entered. A person whose conduct is controlled in this way has at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is directed by forces over which he has no command. (pp. 64-65)

Effective action was tempered by thinking which Dewey (1922) would translate as "deliberation" or "dramatic rehearsal" or "activity following intra-organic channels" (p. 191). Deliberation is a wonderful word to describe how conflicting impulses lost their freedom to go unchecked: They were not liberated but de-liberated. Here, scientific thinking–what Weil (1987) called "directing one's reason well"(p.47)–transformed crude impulse into refined action. The result would be what Weil called indirect action or work and what Dewey called intelligent action.

Indirect action (work) was the key to changing one's self for the better; trying to control one's impulses directly was a recipe for failure–like a dog chasing its own tail. Work consisted of directing one's attention outward, grappling with the surrounding conditions of existence which more or less resisted one's efforts at control. Out of this struggle, the necessary discipline could be furnished to master oneself. Dewey could not agree more:

> We cannot change habit directly: that notion is magic. But we can change it indirectly by modifying conditions, by an intelligent selecting and weighting of the objects which engage attention and which influence the fulfillment of desires. (Dewey, 1922, p. 20)

In this way, the wisdom of the Socratic dictum became concrete: To know oneself was to reveal and to refashion oneself through work.

So far in our comparison, we could say that Dewey's and Weil's views on wisdom dovetail very well. Both of them undertake a psychological journey in their quest for wisdom, and both stay with their starting point–the transaction between a self and the environment. However, a slight tension can be detected in the way they conduct their inquiry. Written in the third person, *Human Nature and Conduct* (Dewey, 1922) is a more conventional scholarly approach: The investigator appears as a detached observer taking notes on what is happening in the psyche. "Science and Perception in Descartes" (Weil, 1987, pp. 31-88) is divided in two sections: The first part is a third-person commentary on Descartes; the second part, Weil's own Cartesian journey of doubt, is appropriately–given the nature of her task–written in the first person. Perhaps her supervisor thought, "What impudence! This young woman thinks she can parallel the journey of the great Descartes!" If so, it is no wonder she received a low mark: Her thesis did not fit the rubric of acceptable scholarship, which usually involved analyzing and elucidating a modest portion of a great thinker's work. If Dewey had been her supervisor, would he have been more receptive to her dissertation? Would not Dewey have applauded the following statement, which seemed so close to his view of science and his theory of education? Among the conclusions to her thesis, Weil wrote:

> And so outside of effective action, when the body, in which past perceptions are inscribed, is relieved from the necessity of exploration, human thought is given over to the passions, to the kind of imagination that conjures up gods, to more or less reasonable-sounding arguments received from others. That is why mankind needs science, provided that instead of imposing its proofs it is taught in the way

> that Descartes called analytic, that is, in such a way that each student, following the same order he would follow if he were methodically making discoveries himself, may be said less to receive instruction than to teach himself. (pp. 85-86)

Weil not only believed that she was being faithful to the spirit of Descartes by undertaking her own journey of self-instruction, but that Descartes had demanded such a journey from any reader who wished to understand him:

> Cartesian thought is not something that one can comment on from the outside; every commentator must become, at least for a time, a Cartesian. But how does one become a Cartesian? To be a Cartesian is to doubt everything, and then to examine everything in order; without believing in anything except one's own thought insofar as it is clear and distinct, and without trusting the authority of anyone, even Descartes, in the least. (Weil, 1987, p. 54)

Where is the tension between Dewey and Weil? None of the foregoing is meant to imply that Weil's first-person journey is superior to Dewey's third-person approach. The reader is attracted to Weil's impetuosity–her boldness to plunge in with little regard for what her supervisor might think. She is drawn vicariously into the water with the swimmer who feels that mixture of pleasure and pain (Weil, 1987, pp. 55-56). The determined reader has to work harder to experience the same with Dewey, and perhaps the increased effort demanded of the reader provides a greater reward.[43] Nevertheless, in Weil's account one sees more vividly a person struggling with her thinking in a way that makes Dewey

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[43] Not everyone would agree. For Egan (2002), untangling Deweyan syntax is not worth the effort. He considers Dewey to be a mere plagiarist of Herbert Spencer.

appear relatively calm. Perhaps this simply reflects the difference in their ages–comparing the impetuosity of a 20-something with the serenity of a 60-something. Or perhaps Dewey, like his pragmatist predecessor, C. S. Peirce, would question the wisdom of undertaking the Cartesian journey of doubt and might wonder if it is truly possible to doubt everything except "one's own thought insofar as it is clear and distinct." Outside of testing ideas in practical experience, why should one trust or assume that one's thinking is clear? [44]

Wisdom and the Disappearing Self

To return to the question: What bearing has the above excursus on discovering an important tension between Dewey and Weil? Dewey's third-person stance puts him in the position of observing the psyche from the outside. Look again at the way he describes deliberation:

> Deliberation means precisely that activity is disintegrated, and that its various elements hold one another up. While none has force enough to become the center of a re-directed activity, or to dominate a course of action, each has enough power to check others from exercising mastery. Activity does not cease in order to give

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[44] "We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices . . . we actually have . . . . A person may . . . find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in this case he doubts because he has a positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim" (Peirce cited in Dipert, 1999, ¶ 11). Since we begin our lives believing the ideas given to us by our parents, caregivers, teachers, and other authorities, there is no practical reason to doubt an idea until it is found to be false or problematic in an actual, specific situation in which the idea is put to a test. Weil's Cartesian journey of doubt can be interpreted as a series of thought experiments or tests performed through reflecting on her own accumulated experience, but unlike Descartes, she sees no need to base the clarity of her thoughts on the existence of God.

> way to reflection; activity is turned from execution into intra-organic channels, resulting in dramatic rehearsal. (Dewey, 1922, p. 191)

The "self" seems to have disappeared. It has no ontological status apart from the pattern of biologically derived impulses holding themselves in check and eventually reorganizing themselves into a new pattern or reconstructed habit where the previously incompatible desires achieve a new harmony. As we saw in Chapter Two, the beginning of wisdom appears in a new and better ordering of desires: Temperance is the root of reasonableness, rationality means that the relations among competing desires have been tempered, each relation defined by a new ratio that when combined with other ratios achieve a new harmony which is expressed in effective action. The "self" comes back into view. Although Dewey lays out in detail how habits are re-constructed through enduring interests, one cannot help feeling that there is something magical and mysterious about how the self reappears after deliberation as a morally stronger bundle of habits.

By contrast, Weil examines her own thinking from the inside and cannot allow her "self" to disappear because she is more explicitly both spectator and participant. Her "self" is a dual being which seeks unity through self-mastery (Dewey's tempered mingling of desires). From Weil's perspective, this unity is effected through a painful struggle where the active part–the being which can effect a grasp on the world through work–seeks to diminish the weight of the passive part insofar as it is subject to the world. Implied (but never stated) is Weil's identification of her "true self" with the active part.

There is a sense in which Dewey both agrees and disagrees with her. Yes, the "self" is created in action, but one must be careful that in conceiving the self this way one

does not fall into the trap of hypostatization–reifying a concept into a real existent. Reminded of his own youthful struggles with absolute idealism, Dewey might look kindly at this intense young woman and gently remonstrate her for falling into the "philosophic fallacy" where functional distinctions are mistakenly awarded ontological status. For Dewey, the "self" is shorthand for denoting a more or less ordered system of processes and impulses. As a naturalist, Dewey sees no separate existence of a "self" or a "soul" apart from the biological and chemical activities which define it, just as a beautiful snowflake does not exist apart from the water molecules which, together with certain environmental conditions, determine the snowflake's unique pattern. Surprisingly, Weil (1950/1977c) agrees with him. The soul or its modern counterpart–the person–has no existence independent of the biological and social mechanisms which make it what it is: an organized yet dynamic series of events. Yet, she maintains, there is something "sacred" within each human being–a desire for good–and it has nothing to do with personality or personhood:

> At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being. (p. 315)

Dewey made a strong case for avoiding the pitfalls of hypostatization when doing scientific or theoretical work. But what about everyday practical living–something that both Dewey and Weil prized? Do we not need to cultivate what Laing (1973) called

"ontological security" to live with some measure of sanity? Does not one need to develop confidence that one is real and that one can relate to others who are experienced as real through acts that demonstrate a faith in oneself? If this is simply a noble lie or a "useful" reification, it loses its functional power as soon as one regards it as such in the warp and woof of daily life. Dewey would acknowledge this, but he would add that we can believe in our real existence naturally defined without necessarily believing in a soul or a self existing apart from the dynamic series and organized patterns of events that we call a living body. Can a soul exist apart from a body? Can form be separated from matter? Here we have another footnote to the longstanding debate between two giants of Greek philosophy, with Weil taking Plato's side and Dewey reiterating the Aristotelian position.

Wisdom and the Thinking Self

Weil demonstrates a variation of ontological security throughout her Cartesian journey. She doubts everything at the outset except one thing–her own thought "insofar as it is clear and distinct" (Weil, 1987, p. 54). One is tempted to say that the one part of her self whose reality she will not doubt is her *ability to think clearly.* But she does not say *that*, and here she departs from Laing (1973) and modern self-actualization theorists: She trusts only *clear thoughts*. And this is consistent with the way she lived: she would rather have been challenged on the truth of her thoughts than have been complimented on her intellectual ability to formulate those thoughts. The important issue was not whether the thoughts belonged to her as a form of intellectual property, but whether the thoughts were true. For her, clarity was the initial– though not necessarily the final–criterion of truth. Clarity impelled her to examine the truth of an idea in the crucible of experience.

To use Deweyan language: "Truth as a positive, achieved thing simply means that use *has* tested and *has* approved what was an intellectual, and so problematic affair, and thereby has given it an assured status in further effort" (Dewey, 1911/1985b, p. 46). Successful deliberation cleared up a problematic situation, but the clarity, elegance, and coherence of the hypothetical solution was not enough to satisfy a pragmatic conception of truth: The act of thinking was not complete until it was tested in practice (Dewey, 1910/1985a, pp. 234-241). In this regard, Weil was zealously Deweyan: Is Marxism a path of liberation for oppressed workers? She involved herself with trade unions to find out. Will educating workers help them achieve steps towards liberation? In her spare time from her day job as a high school teacher, she instructed railway workers to examine this notion. Why were the Communist unions unable to challenge Nazism? She visited Germany to see for herself. Was the Soviet Union simply another form of oppression for the working class? She tested her hypothesis in a long argument with one of the Russian Bolsheviks, Leon Trotsky. Convinced that the Republican militia were fighting for Spain's "famished peasants against landed proprietors and their clerical supporters" (Weil, 1938/1977d, p. 75), she joined up and soon discovered how the justice of one's cause can quickly be obscured in war by cowardice, cruelty, and wanton disregard for the value of human life: "People get carried away by a sort of intoxication which is irresistible without a fortitude of soul which I am bound to consider exceptional since I have met with it nowhere" (p. 77). Is manual labour a path to wisdom? She worked in a factory and in a vineyard to experience this for herself.

Her whole intellectual journey–from before her 1930 student dissertation through

to her death 13 years later–is based on a trust of clear and distinct thoughts that are tested, purified, modified, or discarded in the fire of one's own experience. By 1942, despite her unshakeable faith in the reality of a realm transcending nature–a confidence born of her mystical experiences which she articulated in a Christian idiom–she refused to compromise her intellectual scruples by accepting baptism in the Catholic church. In fact, far from being threatened by religious superstition, her early confidence in clear thinking was somehow connected to her developing view of supernatural truth. Weil (1950/1959) believed "that one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth" (p. 36).

Thinking clearly–the active part of the self–operated through a conduit to the environment, what Dewey called the transaction and what Weil (1987) called the imagination, "this knot of action and reaction that attaches me to the world" (p. 70). On closer examination, two types of thoughts can be distinguished in the imagination: (a) those which impose themselves and are fused with impulse, feeling, or emotion – a pang of hunger, a painful injury, a friend's rebuke; and (b) those which do not impose themselves but require work to make themselves apparent and clear–knowing how to swing an axe with grace and power, knowing how to write a line of poetry, understanding a theorem in geometry.[45] Weil (1930/1987) concluded:

If I try to discover how much trust should be put in the thought harbored by the

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[45] Except for the example drawn from mathematics, the illustrations presented here for both types of thoughts are mine, not Weil's. The three examples of thoughts that require work correspond to categories of learning outcomes drawn from Posner and Rudnitsky (2001): respectively, they are psychomotor-perceptual skills, cognitive skills, and cognitive understandings.

> imagination, I find that the clear ideas alone do not represent the encroachment of the world on me, since they are made present to me only by an act of my own attention. (p. 72)

Developing the ability to pay attention increasingly became her preferred method of discerning clear ideas–whether such thought was provoked by the imposition of a problem or whether the thing attended to was contemplated as an object of beauty. For Dewey (1929a), thinking and knowing were, strictly speaking, associated more with problem-solving and productive action than they were with contemplation (pp. 269-270, 289-290). Chapter Five will examine these differences in greater detail.

Weil rejected the view that thinking could be explained as a natural product issuing forth from a progressively sophisticated pattern of material forces. Following Plato's teaching in conjunction with the scientific conception of entropy, Weil (1943/1962b) maintained that "the imperfect cannot give rise to the perfect or the less good to the better" (p. 44).[46] Is Dewey's magnificent naturalistic description of

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[46] Weil might reason analogically as follows: A perfect triangle exists nowhere, yet we refer to it in our minds when we attempt to draw one. If we used a less than perfect triangle as our referent, our drawing would be even less perfect. She translates this to the realm of human morality as follows: "It is only the thought of perfection that produces any good–and this good is imperfect. If one aims at imperfect good, one does evil" (Weil, 1950/1970, p. 342). But where does this thought of perfection originate?

Weil distinguished between plural goods embodied in existence and the Good beyond being. Following Plato, she believed that existent goods derived their "goodness" from transcendent Good. Plural goods existed on the same plane as, and were opposed to, plural evils. The Good transcended the good/evil opposition. It had no opposite (Weil, 1956, pp. 592–593). It was her contention that if one oriented one's attention and desire to the Good beyond being, then and only then, existent goods would be strengthened and non-existent goods would come into being. If one oriented one's attention and desire wholly to existent goods, then these goods would degrade and evil would increase. To use Deweyan language, this hypothesis required a proper test, but

deliberation and habit a variation of materialism? We will consider this question in more detail below. Regardless, Weil (1955/1958) believed that the connection between thought and action would remain an unfathomable mystery despite advances in neuroscience or physiological psychology: "The extreme complexity of vital phenomena can perhaps be progressively unraveled, at any rate to a certain extent; but the immediate relationship linking our thoughts to our movements will always remain wrapped in impenetrable obscurity" (p. 89). It is difficult to understand how she can be so sure. Dewey might counter that her bold assertion is based on a false, ontological dichotomy between thinking and acting. If one asserts, as he did, that thinking is acting turned inwards, then the problem disappears. The relationship between thinking and acting is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

To sum up the comparison so far: Dewey and Weil substantially agree on what wisdom is from a psychological point of view. They locate its genesis in the transaction between a self and its environment. Wisdom begins to take root when activity is diverted from immediate outward expression through inward deliberation towards mediated, indirect action or work. For both, the test of experience is essential in verifying or modifying ideas and developing wisdom. However, a fissure seems to appear in their respective positions when we examine their views of the moral self. From her first-person perspective, Weil experiences a binary tension within the transaction where the self and its environment are linked in a wrestling match: Her active self seeks to increase

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what would constitute a proper test outside of employing Weil's method of paying attention? These ideas are rooted in Plato's *Symposium* (See Chapter 6).

its grasp on the environment, while her passive self allows the environment to encroach. Impelled by a desire to achieve mastery of herself–the active part overcoming the passive part–Weil discovers that clear thoughts (the only thing she trusts at the outset) are secured through the active work of attention. From his third-person perspective, Dewey describes a plurality of tensions among competing desires which hold each other up in deliberation as old habits are disrupted. Thinking is employed to find a way to unite the desires around enduring interests in order to forge a better transaction with the environment (i.e., a new habit is constructed out of the remnants of the old one). The widening fissure can be postulated as follows: Dewey loves experiential wisdom inasmuch as it creates a self that grows progressively stronger and richer from a moral point of view. Weil loves experiential wisdom inasmuch as it reveals clear thoughts that act as stepping stones on the way to truth. To Dewey, Weil is dangerously close to committing the philosophic fallacy, a form of self-delusion that seeks to vouchsafe the hard-won insights of experience by inventing a realm called "transcendent." Is she not holding on to "either/or" thinking–that ancient dualism that kept mind and matter ontologically separate? To Weil, Dewey may be guilty of "lowering the sights" of philosophy by aiming at personal growth and social usefulness at the expense of a commitment to truth.

How Is Wisdom Connected to the Social Dimension of Experience?

Both Dewey and Weil would agree that humans are unavoidably social beings and that the wisdom of moral deliberation entails taking into account connections that bind a self to others. Dewey finds meaning through making connections, and the more connections that are ascertained in deliberation, the more meaningful a chosen activity

becomes, no matter how mundane that activity may seem at first glance. Dewey & Tufts (1932/1989) uncover how an ideal functions in the love of wisdom, and they use Weil's favorite Christian poet to drive the point home:

> The genuine ideal . . . is the sense that each of these special situations brings with it its own inexhaustible meaning, that its value reaches far beyond its direct local existence. Its nature is perhaps best expressed in the verses of George Herbert: "Who sweeps a room as for Thy Laws / Makes that and th'action fine." (p. 273)

For Dewey, the social dimension (whether an association of values that live within an individual or an actual society of individuals) is the criterion that distinguishes fleeting pleasure from enduring happiness: "Harmony and readiness to expand into union with other values is a mark of happiness. Isolation and liability to conflict and interference are marks of those states which are exhausted in being pleasurable" (p. 199).

First, let us examine how the social dimension functions within an individual as an association of values in Dewey's psychology. Those who assume that an American pragmatist and a French Platonist are diametrically opposed might be surprised to see how much Dewey's moral self resembles Plato's just man.[47] In his *Ethics*, Dewey (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989b) shows how the four cardinal virtues (courage, justice,

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[47] In an autobiographical essay published the same year as the revision of *Ethics*, Dewey made an startling admission: His favourite philosophical reading was Plato! Perhaps his well-known attacks on this Greek thinker were more directed at what he called the "artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor" than at the Plato he admired, "whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn" (Dewey, 1932/1989b, p. 155). It seems that when Garrison (1997) targets Plato in the name of Dewey, he is attacking the artificial one.

temperance, and wisdom) are not really separate virtues; they are simply different features that cohere seamlessly in one moral self. Notice how he begins the following passage with what is less an attack on the classical conceptions of virtue than it is a criticism of empiricist notions such as those held by Benjamin Franklin, whose list of virtues lacked a unifying framework:[48]

> The mere idea of a catalogue of different virtues commits us to the notion that virtues may be kept apart, pigeon-holed in water-tight compartments. In fact virtuous traits interpenetrate one another; this unity is involved in the very idea of integrity of character. At one time persistence and endurance in the face of obstacles is the most prominent feature; then the attitude is the excellence called courage. At another time, the trait of impartiality and equity is uppermost, and we call it justice. At other times, the necessity for subordinating immediate satisfaction of a strong appetite or desire to a comprehensive good is the conspicuous feature. Then the disposition is denominated temperance, self-control. When the prominent phase is the need for thoughtfulness, for consecutive and persistent attention, in order that these other qualities may function, the interest receives the name of moral wisdom, insight, conscientiousness. In each case, the difference is one of emphasis only. (pp. 257-258)

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[48] In his autobiography, Franklin (1909) listed 13 virtues that he wished to develop in himself: "My intention being to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I judg'd it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time." (Continuation, Part III). From Dewey's perspective, this approach is misdirected: One cannot cultivate virtues directly, since they are always the byproduct of effective action undertaken by a whole self.

However, Dewey did differ from Plato here in at least one important respect: Plato's conception of justice was more comprehensive. It was not simply the impartial phase or the equitable feature of moral character; it was identical to it. When wisdom, courage, and temperance interpenetrated and supported one another, when each part of the soul fulfilled its proper function according to the dictates of wisdom, then Plato used the term "justice" to describe the virtuous soul or moral self in its unity, harmony, coherence, wholeness, and integrity (Cornford, 1945, pp. 139-143).

Second, let us examine how the social dimension functions as an association of individuals in Dewey's social psychology. Dewey reverses Plato's *Republic* in constructing his democratic ideal. The *Republic* sets up an imaginary society as a heuristic device to show how justice is achieved by analogy in the individual soul. Dewey (1922) begins *Human Nature and Conduct* with the individual psyche by describing how a tempered wisdom is achieved through the comingling of conflicting desires in deliberation. Dewey implicitly projects what is going on in the psyche onto the screen of the wider society: The well-tempered community could be achieved through a democratic form of life in which separate-yet-connected individuals with differing goals and temperaments seek ways to achieve a "working" unity through intelligent collaboration.

What was Dewey's democratic ideal, and how was it connected to wisdom? In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927/1954) distinguished democracy as a social idea from democracy as a particular form of representative government. The specific forms of political democracy such as constitutional monarchy (United Kingdom, Canada)

or a republican system of checks and balances (United States) owed their existence not to democratic ideas per se (however influential these ideas might have been) but to changing material and social conditions effected by technology. No doubt influenced by Marx in this regard, Dewey anticipated the trenchant analyses of Ellul (1954/1970) and Heidegger (1954/1977) by 2 decades: "The transition from family and dynastic government supported by the loyalties of tradition to popular government was the outcome primarily of technological discoveries and inventions working a change in the customs of which men had been bound together" (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 144). On the other hand, Dewey's democratic ideal–like any ideal–had a nonhistorical quality which seemed to transcend time and place. He was well aware of this and harbored no illusions: An ideal was based on something which truly existed "carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected. Since things do not attain such fulfillment but are in actuality distracted and interfered with, democracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be" (p. 148). Yet, despite the arguments of those who embraced a more "realistic" version of modern democracy,[49] Dewey refused to let go of participatory democracy as an end-in-view for creating a more genuine and wiser community–a public that could find itself, a society that could intelligently deliberate and foresee the consequences of its conjoint activities:

> From the standpoint of the individual, [the democratic idea] consists in having a

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[49] One of these democratic realists, Walter Lippman, challenged Dewey's idealism. Lippman convincingly argued that the electorate did not have the competence to participate meaningfully in the increasingly complex world of political democracy. Accordingly, experts in civil service bureaucracies who advised elected politicians had taken over the function formerly served by ordinary citizens in the town-hall meetings of a bygone age. See Westbrook (1991, pp. 294-300).

> responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activity of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups. (p. 147)

Dewey's democratic idea was the metahabit of wisdom socially transposed: It bound individuals and groups together without strangling them. More than being simply the social corollary of the moral self, the unavoidable web of social connections were necessary to the very construction of that moral self:

> A good citizen finds his conduct as a member of a political group enriching and enriched by his participation in family life, industry, scientific and artistic associations. This is a free give-and-take; fullness of integrated personality is therefore possible of achievement, since the pulls and responses of different groups reinforce one another and their values accord. (p. 148)

The individual was not only circumscribed by the groups to which she belonged, she was to a great degree defined by them. Each group had a share in making the self what it was.

Both Dewey and Weil believed that wise deliberation kept the social dimension constantly in view. Weil followed Marx in emphasizing that society was the fundamental human fact. Although she debunked the Marxist formula that "social

existence determines consciousness,"[50] she appreciated his attempt to analyze the relationships of force in reference to human society in the manner of a physicist who analyzed these relationships in reference to inert matter. She took Marx's position and reframed it in a way that kept the relationships of social forces intact while maintaining that humans understood as individuals were relatively free:

> Men are not the impotent playthings of fate; they are eminently active beings; but their activity is at each moment limited by the structure of the society which they form among themselves, and only modifies that structure in its turn by a ricochet, once it has modified the relations between them and nature. The social structure can never be modified except indirectly. (Weil, 1955/1958, p. 149)

The structure of society, like the structure of the moral self, could only be transformed indirectly through work, which from a social perspective meant conjoint activity channeled through the means of production. Amish Mennonites understand this: To conserve their social structure which is constructed around the value of manual labour, they resist technological change. Whoever *owned* the means of production was *not* the decisive issue. Altering the *means* of production was the key to real social change, even though the issue of ownership was inextricably linked to it. If this is true, then education

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[50] Dewey (1929a), who asserted that mind was "a function of social interactions" (p. xvii), would probably agree with her refutation of Marx: "Seeing that what is 'social' can have an existence only in human minds, 'social existence' is itself already consciousness; it cannot in addition determine a consciousness which would in any case remain to be defined. To posit in this way a 'social existence' as a special determining factor divorced from our consciousness, hidden no one knows where, is to make a hypostasis of it; and it constitutes, furthermore, a beautiful example of Marx's tendency towards dualism" (Weil, 1955/1958, pp. 133-134).

could effect Dewey's hoped-for social transformation only if it was aimed at equipping students with the ability and the desire to comprehend technology (i.e., clearly understanding how humans interact with human and nonhuman nature through productive work and intelligently changing that interaction based on a knowledge of foreseeable consequences). No wonder that Dewey's laboratory school had occupations at the core of its curriculum. The ever-expanding patterns of relationships that working individuals formed around the means of production, patterns that became increasingly complex through specialization and division of labour, crystallized into powerful social mechanisms that could be as blind and as dangerous as any force of nature. Ironically, unruly nature, seemingly domesticated through collective human action, reappeared within the social structure with all the oppressive power of an arbitrary deity.[51] How could it be mastered? Weil (1955/1958) answered:

> To gain mastery over it means to subject it to the human mind, that is to the individual. In the subordination of society to the individual lies the definition of true democracy and that of socialism as well. (p. 20) . . . The only hope of socialism resides in those who have already brought about in themselves, as far as is possible in the society of today, that union between manual and intellectual labour which characterizes the society we are aiming at. (p. 23)

What type of society was she aiming at? Did Weil have a democratic ideal comparable to

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[51] See Crozier (1964) for a brilliant analysis of how modern bureaucratic structures imprison and warp human intention and behaviour. However much it may appear as perfectly rational in an organizational flow chart, the phenomenon of bureaucracy often belies the intentions of those who "run" it and is often experienced as a pitiless and indifferent machine by those who inhabit it.

Dewey's? Yes. In *Oppression and Liberty*, Weil (1955/1958) described the pragmatic function of an ideal in terms that echo Dewey:

> Perfect liberty is what we must try to represent clearly to ourselves, not in the hope of attaining it, but in the hope of attaining a less imperfect liberty than is our present condition; for the better can be conceived only by reference to the perfect. One can only steer towards an ideal. The ideal is just as unattainable as the dream, but differs from the dream in that it concerns reality; it enables one, as a mathematical limit, to grade situations, whether real or realizable, in an order of values from least to greatest. (p. 84)

Like Dewey, she began with the individual:

> True liberty is not defined by a relationship between desire and its satisfaction, but by a relationship between thought and action; the absolutely free man would be he whose every action proceeded from a preliminary judgment concerning the end which he set himself and the sequence of means suitable for attaining this end. (p. 85)

Although his phrasing was comparatively less strident and included an awareness of contingency, Dewey (1929b) had exactly the same conception of freedom:

> Freedom is an actuality when the recognition of relations, the stable element, is combined with the uncertain element, in the knowledge which makes foresight possible and secures intentional preparation for the probable consequences. We are free in the degree in which we act knowing what we are about. (pp. 249-250)

However, instead of using the social dimension as the criterion for defining happiness in

the individual as Dewey seemed to do, Weil (1955/1958) used the individual as the criterion for defining the "least evil society." A truly democratic society served the needs of the individual:

> To sum up, the least evil society is that in which the general run of men are most often obliged to think while acting, have the most opportunities for exercising control over collective life as a whole, and enjoy the greatest amount of independence. (p. 103)

Weil was much more wary of the social dimension than Dewey. This was part of the reason she never joined the Communist party or the Catholic church: "As soon as a party finds itself cemented not only by the coordination of activities, but also by unity of doctrine, it becomes impossible for a good militant to think otherwise than in the manner of a slave" (pp. 30 -31). Like Dewey, she saw how a community of relatively free individuals could be become unthinking cogs in a collective machine. Nevertheless, her notion of freedom was not the romantic ideal of rugged individualism so often celebrated in American westerns. All that an individual owned–even her sense of worth, her self-esteem–was derived from the social element. Weil's experience as an anonymous factory worker removed all doubt on that score. Yet, there was one thing that an individual could do which a collectivity never could. An individual could think. Weil (1950/1977b) described it in stark terms: "A collectivity is much stronger than a single man; but every collectivity depends for its existence upon operations, of which simple addition is the elementary example, which can only be performed by a mind in a state of solitude" (p. 320). By solitude, she did not mean physical isolation from others, although this may be

necessary from time to time. She was merely pointing out that when thinking clearly and effectively, a person had to focus on an issue or problem without being intimidated by the presence of others or what others might think. Since calculating machines have taken over many of these "simple operations" and computers are able to process information in speed and quantity in ways that literally boggle the best of human minds, one wonders whether a collectivity has the potential to be exponentially more powerful than even Weil could imagine. This raises a number of related questions: Could a society exist without depending on human minds performing operations in solitude? In theory, is there anything about human reasoning that could not be duplicated by a machine? And if such a dimension of reasoning could be shown to exist, would it be considered essential for maintaining or improving a social order? Or, alternatively, would it be considered a threat to that order? If not, would there be any use or purpose for a uniquely human form of thinking?

Weil's (1955/1958) criterion for measuring freedom and democracy in a society was the extent to which the patterns of relationships among individuals could be understood by each thinking individual:

> Thus, if we wish to form, in a purely theoretical way, the conception of a society in which collective life would be subject to men as individuals instead of subjecting them to itself, we must visualize a form of material existence wherein only efforts exclusively directed by a clear intelligence would take place, which would imply that each worker himself had to control, without referring to any external rule, not only the adaptation of his efforts to the piece of work to be

> produced, but also their coordination with the efforts of all other members of the collectivity. (pp. 98-99)

Is this not a clear statement of the democratic ideal which Dewey prized? If one thinks that Weil valued autonomous individualism over and above Deweyan shared experience, the following elaboration dispels that notion unreservedly:

> Such a society alone would be a society of men free, equal and brothers. Men would, it is true, be bound by collective ties, but exclusively in their capacity as men; they would never be treated by each other as things. Each would see in every work-fellow another self occupying another post, and would love him in the way the Gospel maxim enjoins. Thus we should possess, over and above liberty, a still more precious good: for if nothing is more odious than the humiliation and degradation of man by man, nothing is so beautiful or so sweet as friendship. (pp. 99-100)

For Weil (1950/1959), the social dimension could be embraced as an unqualified good only within the narrow domain and rare event of pure friendship, which she strictly defined as a "supernatural harmony, a union of opposites" (p. 154). The opposites which composed this union were necessity and liberty. Friendship was experienced by a pair of individuals when each one pursued her own good in a relationship with the other (a desire for attachment experienced as need or necessity), while simultaneously wishing that the good of the other be increased (a desire for detachment experienced as liberty). Liberty in friendship was born out of a double-edged respect: Each person cherished the faculty of free consent–both in the other and in oneself at the same time. Friendship was freely

given and received. It could not be forced. *Philia*, the love involved in friendship, was described by Weil (1952-1955/1956) in a way which challenges those who believe that a shared experience simply means having a "good" time together:

> Love in the case of someone who is happy is to wish to share the suffering of the beloved who is unhappy. Love in the case of someone who is unhappy is to be filled with joy by the mere knowledge that the beloved is happy, without sharing in this happiness or even desiring to do so. (p. 270)

Granted that friendship so conceived was extremely rare and beautiful, why describe the harmony as a *supernatural* one? In the following passage, Weil (1950/1959) used an analogy drawn from the first book of the Bible:

> Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is necessary to him as food. It requires the strength of soul that Eve did not have; and yet she had no need of the fruit. If she had been hungry at the moment when she looked at the fruit, and if in spite of that she had remained looking at it indefinitely without taking one step towards it, she would have performed a miracle analogous to that of perfect friendship. (p. 157)

Weil considered friendship to be the highest form of human association. Even a good marriage had to have friendship at its core if it was to remain good. Weil was very careful with the idea–so often expressed in wedding ceremonies–that the two shall become one. Naturally speaking, this unity was improbable if not impossible without the one seeking to please the other or the one seeking to dominate the other–an unbalanced

union born of necessity but destructive of liberty. True friends accepted themselves freely and equally as distinct creatures in a unity that transcended the natural mechanisms which–unless enlightened by supernatural love–bound people to each other in unhealthy ways: "It is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance which separates them, unless God is present in each of them" (1950/1959, p. 160).[52]

For Weil, the wisdom which bound humans together in the detached attachment of friendship was a supernatural grace. Outside of this grace–which could be experienced by individuals who were not necessarily conscious of its supernatural source (perhaps she might see Dewey in this light)–the social dimension would devolve into an ersatz wisdom binding individuals in ways that strangled their ability to think clearly and act freely. Unless tempered by supernatural grace, all social organizations–churches and religious orders included–had this oppressive tendency. This is why in her proposals for rebuilding postwar France, Weil (1949/1952b) argued for a society in which individuals could find space to breathe, where they could periodically collect their thoughts in solitude and open themselves up to the supernatural grace which was constantly and secretly present but which was more often than not refused entry by the social element which naturally colonized their imagination.

In *The Need for Roots*, Weil's (1949/1952b) blueprint for a democratic society was built on a startling assumption that challenged the principles of the French

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[52] This is an example of how Weil fused her Platonism with her Christianity. She believed that human friendship reflected the divine friendship found among the three persons of the Trinity.

Revolution: Rights were a social phenomenon and existed only when obligations were exercised by humans toward each other. Hence, obligations were prior to rights:

> A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation toward him. (p. 3)

For the Christian Platonist Weil, keeping an obligation was a duty whose roots lay in a supernatural realm beyond the immediate and changing context of a specific situation. However, when an obligation was exercised and made its appearance as a right, it had to take into account particular social conditions. In the following illustration, I draw an analogy from something that Weil, following the ancient Greeks, considered precious and is hinted at by Dewey in his study of deliberation: the mathematical idea of ratio and proportion. Rights in different situations and contexts can appear analogous to different ratios that are nevertheless equivalent: 2 to 4, 3 to 6, 4 to 8, and so on. When the obligation, 1 to 2, needs to be constructed as a right in a particular situation where the prevailing conditions provide 32 as the first term, then the conditions more amenable to modification must be manipulated in such a way that 64 as the second term may appear. There is a sense in which Dewey (1929b) echoed this idea: If certain ideals or values were to be secured in social life, one had to understand how the conditions of existence supported or hindered their existence. By modifying these conditions through the experimental methods of modern science, Dewey was very hopeful that the moral traits found in nature could be as firmly established in the social sphere as mechanical,

electrical, and atomic forces had been harnessed in the physical sphere. Of course, in Dewey's metaphysics, these moral traits had no root in a supernatural realm–they were completely natural. And obligations were conditional; any sense of "owing" or "duty" was predicated on what one judged to be a worthwhile value. By the same token, these judgments were never final: They were hypotheses that guided inquiry into the objective conditions that could or could not support the existence of the chosen value. By being tested in action, hypotheses were open to ongoing modification. If any obligation had unconditional status in Dewey's system, it was the one owed to using and constantly improving the methods of experimental science.

If the supernatural is a human construction as Nietzsche (and Dewey) proclaimed, how could the idea of equality as a foundation for human rights and democracy survive, since nature produced beings unequal in strength and intelligence? Ironically, Nietzsche could not help inventing his own version of the supernatural on which to pin his hopes–the *Ubermensch.* Even heroic atheism had to have larger than life heroes. For Weil, the fact that humans could not help constructing ersatz forms of the supernatural (idols) was an indirect proof for its reality. Real hunger expresses a need for real food.[53] Idols, however, could not deliver the justice, equality, and liberty which humans craved. Quite the contrary, they enslaved and oppressed them.

Ersatz forms of the supernatural were social constructions that derived their power

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[53] Strictly speaking, the existence of hunger does not necessarily prove the existence of food, even though it may provide grounds for *hoping* in the existence of food. Weil said she would never let go of her desire for absolute good, even if it could be proved that there was no such thing. Like a Penelope waiting for her Odysseus, she would rather remain unsatisfied than betray her desire and aim it toward relative goods.

from energy derived from collective ties. Hitler understood this. Organized religion more or less succumbed to it. This is why Weil was so wary of the social element and why she took great pains to construct an ideal society that was based on the needs of individuals rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, the social element was an unavoidable necessity for human beings. Hence, Weil (1949/1952b, p. 7) argued, "we owe our respect to a collectivity, of whatever kind – country, family, or any other – not for itself, but because it is food for a certain number of human souls."

Obligations towards human beings were derived from their needs. What were they? Of course, physical needs came first–food, clothing, and shelter–and provided Weil with a model for establishing rights based on eternal obligations:

> To no matter whom the question may be put in general terms, nobody is of the opinion that any man is innocent if, possessing food himself in abundance and finding someone on his doorstep three parts dead from hunger, he brushes past without giving him anything. (Weil, 1949/1952b, p. 6)

Physical needs would be more difficult to ascertain in a consumer culture that blurred the distinction between needs and luxuries. Nevertheless, the effort to do so would invariably invoke a premier need for the human psyche–*order*–which Weil defined as "a texture of social relationships such that no one is compelled to violate imperative obligations in order to carry out other ones" (p. 10).[54] The subsequent descriptions of

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[54] A person who identifies herself on the right-to-life side of the abortion debate might argue that our present society is failing to provide this need of order in that the obligation to respect human life is violated by the obligation to respect human choice. A prochoice advocate might argue the reverse: No one is being compelled to terminate a pregnancy, but at least a woman's right to choose is not violated as it had been prior to Roe v. Wade.

more specific needs give the reader a clearer picture of what such a social order entailed. Most of these needs were arranged in antithetical pairs and seemed to require a miraculous harmony analogous to the one found between necessity and liberty in friendship. Each term of a pair could be balanced in alternating sequence[55] just as breathing in followed breathing out: liberty/obedience, equality/hierarchy, honor/punishment, security/risk, private property/collective property. In addition, she discussed the need for responsibility, freedom of opinion, truth, and the one which furnished the book's title: the need for roots.

Over 80% of her treatise described the modern malaise of uprootedness along with a prescription for its cure. According to Weil (1949/1952b), a human being has roots "by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future" (p. 43). How one understood the relation of past treasures to future expectations was a life-and-death matter for Weil. In order to build a future, one could use only materials provided by the past:

The future brings us nothing, gives us nothing; it is we who in order to build it

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However, the latter position raises a very pertinent question: If one member of the human species may decide that another member of the human species can be terminated without regard to any criterion except the choice of the former, then what is it about human beings that they should have any rights at all? The fact that the former may have legal status as a person and the latter may not only moves the question to another level. See Grant (1974) for an extended discussion on this question.

[55] Weil (1949/1952b) rejected Aristotle's golden mean, which to her satisfied "neither the one nor the other of two contrary needs. It is a caricature of the genuinely balanced state in which contrary needs are each fully satisfied in turn" (p. 12).

> have to give it everything, our very life. But to be able to give, one has to possess; and we possess no other life, no other living sap, then the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us. Of all the human soul's needs, none is more vital than this one of the past. (p. 51)

By cutting off its living connections to the premodern past, Weil argued, France had become a shallow-rooted tree easily toppled by the German invasion of 1940. By contrast, Weil admired England, which had nurtured a living tradition and "which in the face of the first wave of German terror behaved far and away the best" (p. 49).[56]

Dewey (1927/1954) also saw a need for roots, which he called attachments that "are nourished in constant relationships. Acceleration of mobility disturbs them at their root. And without abiding attachments associations are too shifting and shaken to permit a public readily to locate and identify itself" (pp. 140 -141). Modern technological science wedded to various forms of dynamic capitalism (the Soviet Union was a form of state capitalism) uprooted and continues to uproot individuals from the communities in which they had been nourished by a living tradition. As a result, in the space of a few generations, these traditional communities were disappearing. Dewey also recognized that these face-to-face communities had to be remade, for they were the only hope that a public had of finding itself, of creating the material and social conditions for a democratic way of life:

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[56] Weil's admiration needs to be qualified by recognizing that certain conditions favoured England–such as the relative strength of the British air force and navy, which discouraged the Germans from following up aerial bombardment with an amphibious landing on English shores. Nevertheless, her admiration was based on her experience living among these plucky Anglo-Saxons.

> In its deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse. This is why the family and the neighborhood, with all their deficiencies, have always been the chief agencies of nurture, the means by which dispositions are stably formed and ideas acquired which laid hold on the roots of character. (p. 211)

Outside of educational reform, Dewey was not sure how the conditions necessary for community could be reestablished, and he seemed more equivocal than Weil in opposing the industrial juggernaut that relentlessly uprooted the genuine communities that remained. However, Weil saw in France an opportunity to create these conditions because French industry had been devastated by war. By contrast, war had accelerated the development of the military-industrial complex in North America, strengthening the ties that bound Canada to the United States while simultaneously uprooting the local communities in both.[57]

Weil believed that the material and social conditions necessary for a more democratic form of life could be created in France immediately after the war, and she implored her compatriots in London to adopt her ideas before the war ended. If they did, the future leaders of France would be in a position to implement them before the window of opportunity opened by the immediate aftermath of war would be closed by the reestablishment of prewar habits that would be activated by an enduring interest in corporate capitalism–an interest shared by their American liberators who were more than

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[57] Grant's (1965/1970) lament for Canada mourns the loss of a nation that was being displaced by continental capitalism.

willing to offer aid in this regard.

What was the nature of this opportunity? The war had forced intellectuals–a tag she despised–to work in the fields and factories of Germany and, to a lesser extent, in France. Weil's (1949/1952b) tone was urgent:

> This extremely valuable experience runs the risk of being wasted, due to the irresistible temptation to forget humiliation and misfortune as soon as one has left them behind. Now, straightaway, those among such prisoners who have returned should be approached and asked to keep up their contacts with the workers, which had been begun by force, think over themselves what this recent experience has meant, with the idea of effecting a *rapprochement* between culture and the people, thereby giving culture a new direction. (p. 72)

In other words, the new direction for culture involved uniting the intellectual and physical dimensions of labour in everyone as far as possible.

Nevertheless, such an endeavour would remain nothing more than wishful thinking unless certain material prerequisites were met. The most important and the most radical of these requirements involved destroying the sacred cows of corporate capitalism: breaking up large factories and abolishing incorporated joint-stock companies. This did not mean that Weil was opposed to private ownership of business–far from it. She upheld property–both private and collective–as a vital need for the soul:

> All men have an invincible inclination to appropriate in their own minds anything which over a long, uninterrupted period they have used for their work, pleasure, or the necessities of life . . . . But where the feeling of appropriation doesn't coincide

> with any legally recognized proprietorship, men are continually exposed to extremely painful spiritual wrenches. (Weil, 1949/1952b, pp.34-35)

The need for property was met in real and prolonged contact with land and materials. The farm I worked on was mine, even though as a hired hand I had no legal title to it. When the farm was sold, the trees and vineyards razed, and the land scoured into an industrial park, something extremely valuable had been taken from me. I still mourn its loss.

Property was a meaningless abstraction in a factory or a farm owned by a joint-stock company because the workers and managers held no legal title to it and the stockholders had no real contact with it. The need for property could be satisfied only in smaller businesses and farms where legal title and real contact could be combined in shared ownership and where intellectual and physical labour existed in close proximity. In this regard, she anticipated Schumacher (1973), who had shown how a small manufacturing plant owned jointly by those who worked therein could form a viable and vital economic community. No doubt she would join those who today applaud the efforts of Yunus (2007), who respects and trusts the dignity of the working poor by lending money to those who lack legal title to collateral property. Would not Dewey (1934/1979) also welcome these practical proposals in the light of his criticism of industrial development which had severed the arts into the useful and the fine (p. 27) and where "prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through the control of the bodies and labor of others" (p. 21)?

To sum up the comparison regarding wisdom and the social dimension of

experience: Dewey and Weil agreed that wisdom involved taking into account how humans could best live together in community. Both of them formulated a substantially similar democratic ideal that functioned as an end-in-view for the type of society each wanted to help build. Dewey used the criterion of openness to wider connections–the possibility of further growth–in distinguishing a moral community from one which was less moral. For example, a band of robbers was by definition limited in its potential for wider connections with individuals and groups who were not involved in crime. Weil, on the other hand, used the criterion of individual needs to distinguish a relatively free society from a relatively oppressive one.

Both Dewey and Weil valued intelligent conjoint activity. Just as a moral self was created indirectly through work, so a moral social structure developed indirectly via conjoint activity through the means of production. However, Weil emphasized that thinking could be done only by individuals, not by associations. Dewey and Weil agreed that the substance of thought was largely a social construction, but Weil maintained that only an individual with an unyielding commitment to truth would be able to think about the relationships of force in society with any degree of clarity. Both of them wanted to reconnect intellectual with physical labour, but Weil unequivocally placed physical work at the spiritual core of her ideal society. In her view, all other human activities were inferior to manual work in spiritual significance.

Both Dewey and Weil saw shared experience as an unqualified good. However, Weil added an important qualification that demonstrated how wary she was of the social dimension in contrast to Dewey: Shared experience was dependent on a supernatural

harmony. Further, she believed that the only foundation for a democratic and free society were rights effectively exercised through the recognition of obligations that were rooted in a realm beyond nature.

How Is Wisdom Connected to Nature?

Dewey, of course, would wonder why Weil would need to posit a realm beyond nature to establish a foundation for the type of morality that undergirded democracy. Since moral traits appear in experience alongside amoral forces–or as Weil put it, human beings crave for justice while being subjected to force–Dewey (1929a) deduced that moral traits "may also be supposed to reach down into nature, and to testify to something that belongs to nature as truly as does the mechanical structure attributed to it in physical science" (p. 5). In all construction projects–whether material or intellectual–the building blocks are provided by nature, and human beings, who are thoroughly part of nature, endeavour to secure these blocks in full knowledge that there are no guarantees. There are no certainties in the mixture of stability and contingency that humans experience in their transactions with nature. Just as a tsunami can devastate the lives of millions, so a tyrannical force can destroy a stable democracy. However, humans committed to democratic ideals will resist this force, just as those humans who care for others in misfortune will come to the aid of tsunami victims. The moral traits found in nature are the only source for fashioning the foundational blocks of a democratic form of life. We have no omnipotent, supernatural ally to help us build the good society–we are on our own.

How open would Weil be to the possibility that what she calls "supernatural" may

simply be what Dewey calls the moral traits found in nature? Could the argument be resolved by an appeal to semantics? Could they possibly be using different words to describe the same phenomenon? This appears to be the case when we examine Weil's (1949/1952b) argument against a dualism which asserted that force was sovereign in the natural world but that somehow human beings who are part of nature could have a conception of justice that was not itself subject to force: "Either we must perceive at work in the universe, alongside force, a principle of a different kind, or else we must recognize force as being the unique and sovereign ruler over human relations also" (p. 241). Could we not translate this into Deweyan language? Is not this "principle of a different kind" the same conception as Dewey's "moral traits" which are as much a part of nature as the mechanical forces studied by a physicist?

But how are they a part of nature? What is the relationship between the principle of justice and the principle of blind force in their existence as part of nature? Dewey did not pose this question directly. Nevertheless, did he implicitly assign a unity within nature to these principles? It seemed to be an article of faith for him. If so, Dewey might have been castigated by Weil (1955/1958) as a "simpleton" along with Voltaire and the Encyclopedists who were atheists without being materialists. They wanted to have it both ways:

> But if one leaves the supernatural out of account, one is right to be a materialist. This universe, minus the supernatural, is only matter. In describing it solely as matter, one seizes upon a particle of truth. In describing it as a combination of matter and of specifically moral forces belonging to this world, that are on a level

with nature, one falsifies everything. (p. 177)

Before we conclude that Weil would brand Dewey as a simpleton on par with Voltaire, we must examine Dewey's position in relation to idealism and materialism as defined by Weil. Her unique and intriguing way of defining these old philosophical positions was based on her reading of one obscure sentence in Plato's *Republic* (VI, 493a), namely that there is an infinite distance between the essence of the necessary and the essence of the good. Much of her writing is directly or indirectly concerned with contemplating the meaning of that sentence.[58] Weil (1955/1958) argued that the principle

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[58]Plato uses the analogy of a great beast and its keeper to describe society and the sophist, the so-called teacher of wisdom. Weil's wariness of the social dimension of experience is rooted here. Weil (1950/1959) translates this passage from the Greek as follows:

> Whatever pleases the animal he calls good, whatever annoys him he calls bad, and he has no other criterion. Things that are necessary he calls good and beautiful, for he is incapable of seeing or showing to others *to what degree the essence of the necessary is in reality different from the essence of the good.* (p. 86)

One would need to be a Greek scholar to ascertain whether Weil's translation is more faithful than a well-known translation (Cornford, 1945), where the terms "necessity" and "good" do not appear in stark contrast within the same phrase. It explains why the sentence she italicizes is so obscure:

> He will fit all these terms to the fancies of the great beast and call what it enjoys good and what vexes it bad. He has no other account to give of their meaning; for him any action will be 'just' and 'right' that is done under necessity, since he is too blind to tell how great is the real difference between what must be and what ought to be. (pp. 200-201)

Gouinlock's (2004) beginning premise for his theory of wisdom is instructive here: "I proceed on the assumption, which is essential to human survival and prosperity, that morality comprises precisely those forms of behavior that are necessary for there *to be* a functioning social order" (p. 13). Weil does not dispute the necessity of morality so conceived, but as a Platonist, she maintains that "the good" is essentially different from the ethical behavior that serves to maintain society. *The Need for Roots* (1949/1952b) can be read as her attempt to address the necessity of social order while maintaining a focus on "the good" which transcended it. In the same way, the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus can be read as simultaneous submissions to the necessity of social order and to a love of justice which transcended social norms.

of blind force (necessity) and the principle of justice (good) is experienced as an irreconcilable contradiction within every human:

> He is subject to necessity, and craves for the good. It is not his body alone that is thus subject, but all his thoughts as well; and yet man's very being consists in straining towards the good. That is why we believe that there is a unity between necessity and the good. (p. 159)

Dewey's Hegelian deposit would revolt against calling this contradiction irreconcilable–every thesis produced a corresponding antithesis which could be synthesized in a more comprehensive unity–and he would undoubtedly affirm his belief in the unity, or at least the potential unity, of the physical (necessity) and the moral (good) traits of nature. Nevertheless, let us proceed. Weil (1955/1958) defined idealism as follows:

> Some believe that the thoughts of man concerning the good possess the highest degree of force here below; these are known as idealists. They are doubly mistaken, first in that these thoughts are without force, and secondly in that they do not lay hold of the good. These thoughts are influenced by force; so that this attitude is in the end a less energetic replica of the contrary attitude. (p. 159)

Let us examine whether Dewey commits the double error of idealism so defined. First, was Dewey an idealist who believed that human thoughts concerning ideal ends ("the good" in Weil's terms) had the greatest force here below? No, or at least, not necessarily. Such thoughts could only be realized (i.e., have some measurable force) to the extent to which they were tested in practice through the indirect action of work–where actual

conditions were modified and manipulated in accordance with an end-in-view which was believed to be good. In this process of manipulation, the ends-in-view or ideals were reciprocally clarified and modified. For example, in implementing a lesson, a teacher may have a vague idea regarding the purpose of a planned educational activity. As the activity develops, the responses of the students along with unforeseen contingencies prompt the teacher to modify the activity. In so doing, the educational purpose of the activity becomes clearer, which in turn gives further direction to the activity.

There was nothing necessary about Dewey's idealism. There were no guarantees that ideals would be realized. Precariousness was a generic trait of nature: It could frustrate or vitiate the best of intentions. As shown above, ideals functioned in his philosophy in much the same way as they did in Weil's thought. They were ideal limits towards which we could direct our actions and thoughts, knowing full well that such ideals could never be perfectly realized while at the same time believing that continual efforts would bring us closer to the ideals. Mathematics provides us with a perfect illustration: A hyperbolic curve approaches an asymptote–a line analogous to an ideal limit–getting infinitely closer, but never reaching it. Weil's attack could more appropriately be directed towards the idealism of Hegel, whose emphasis on necessity was so absolute that contingency, though recognized as a minor irritant, carried little weight in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, Hegel would insist, the rational necessity of absolute Spirit becoming progressively aware of itself in and through its

embodiment as the tangible universe was, by implication, necessarily good.[59] This was no longer part of Dewey's Hegelian deposit, if indeed it ever had been.

Did Dewey commit the second error attributed by Weil to idealists? Did he believe that human thoughts could "lay hold of the good"? Here the answer is not as clear. If we stay with the assumption that Weil's "good" was Dewey's "ideal," then an ideal came to mind not through a revelation proceeding from some preexisting realm outside of nature but as a result of acting with existent natural conditions, and as such, was within the reach of our thought. However, it was not so much that a person would lay hold of the ideal–and here wisdom made its appearance in uniting the moral self–but that it would lay hold of a person in a manner that Dewey (1934/1960) described as authentically religious: "the unity of loyalty and effort evoked by the fact that many ends are one in the power of their ideal, or imaginative, quality to stir and hold us" (p. 43).[60]

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[59] My understanding of Hegel is based on Taylor's (1975) very clear and readable exposition and commentary. I have found English translations of Hegel to be very difficult to read–much more so than Plato or Aristotle.

[60] I have probably not done justice to the crucial role that the imagination plays in Dewey's naturalistic wisdom. The end-in-view that propels thinking and doing in Dewey's pragmatism is always the result of an act of the imagination. To generate possible solutions to a problem or to deliberate over possible consequences before committing oneself to a course of action depends on the ability to imagine those solutions or consequences: "Although imagination is often fantastic it is also an organ of nature; for it is the appropriate phase of indeterminate events moving toward eventualities that are now but possibilities" (Dewey, 1929a, p. 54). Imagining a better world is a prerequisite for building one. Perhaps my reticence in emphasizing the imagination with both Dewey and Weil was unconsciously shaped by Sternberg's suggestion that wisdom is primarily grounded in practical thinking. No matter how important a role it played in helping someone think outside of habitual modes of reasoning (what Sternberg would call analytic thinking), creativity or imagination was always subject to the test of practice.

Weil was much more severe than Dewey in her assessment of the imagination, and it reveals a huge rift in their metaphysical positions. For Dewey, reality was defined

Let us now turn to materialism. For Weil (1955/1958), optimistic materialists[61] believe that "force is of itself directed towards the good . . . . They are also doubly mistaken; first force is a stranger to and indifferent to the good, and secondly it is not always and everywhere the stronger" (pp. 159 - 160).

Was Dewey an optimistic materialist who believed that force is of itself directed towards the good? Again, no. He expressed disdain towards those who esteemed force

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by the spatial and temporal order of natural events–one event following another in an endless chain of linked consequences. Since the imagination functioned to predict consequences before they happened, it was tied to the future. For Weil, the spatial-temporal order of natural events was held within a timeless eternity beyond nature which could *not* be imagined. Nevertheless, like Plato, she believed that this supernatural order had a greater reality than natural existence. However, since this timeless reality could not be imagined, Weil was very critical of using imagination outside of its role in clearly conceiving possibilities. If this timeless reality were real, then one had to be very careful that thinking through possibilities did not devolve into desiring an imaginary future that would attain absolute status, as it does in orthodox Marxism. An imaginary future was not to be trusted because it could seduce desire away from an unimaginable reality: "The imagination is always united with a desire, that is to say a value. Only desire without an object is empty of imagination. There is the real presence of God in everything which imagination does not veil" (Weil cited in Panichas, 1977, p. 360).

Furthermore, Weil might argue, the attempt to imagine a timeless eternity would only make it seem more unreal. This is why Dewey's disparagement of Plato's theory of timeless, unchanging forms makes so much sense: any attempt to imagine such an absolute state often results in a fantasy that appears boring or ridiculous in comparison to the dynamic of ever-changing events, events that are inextricably situated within a spatial and temporal network of shifting relations.

[61] "Optimistic materialist" is my term which I believe accurately denotes Weil's characterization of an idolator or a materialist who has not sunk into a state of indifference. If one were to extrapolate further, a pessimistic materialist would believe that force was always supreme and always indifferent to any notion of good or ideal ends. Such a person would be in danger of being overwhelmed by despair or hardened into a state of indifference. From this perspective, Nietzsche can be viewed as a materialist who refused to despair: he hoped for the time when more highly evolved humans would be able to freely create values – literally, to construct "good" out of nothing, for he believed that nature – whether human or non-human – had no moral traits.

above ideal values (Dewey, 1934/1960, p. 44). Like Weil, Dewey recognized that natural forces were indifferent to human ideals. Nature as experienced by humans was a mixture of goods that were enjoyed and evils that were suffered. The generic traits of nature–the stable and the precarious–could be experienced as good or evil depending on the circumstances. Although stability was usually prized as a good thing, there were times when it was endured as monotony. In such cases, the sense of adventure surrounding the unpredictable would provide welcome relief. Nevertheless, by achieving some control over these forces through intelligent inquiry (science), human ideals had a better chance of being realized. Even though force per se was not directed towards human ideals, it could be turned in this direction through the efforts of humans who had not lost sight of the ideals they prized.

In regard to the second error assigned by Weil to materialists–that force was always victorious–Dewey does not seem to have committed it. First, he never lost hope in the democratic ideal in the face of powerful commercial and industrial forces that seemed to be destroying every condition on which a viable democracy would depend. Surely no one could hold on to such a hope if they believed that force was always and everywhere the stronger. Second, he had great respect for the precarious nature of experience, and he would no doubt agree with the wisdom of Ecclesiastes: "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (Barker, 2002, p. 1016).

If Dewey was neither an idealist nor a materialist according to Weil's definition,

was he an atheist? Throughout his later works, Dewey consistently attacked the notion that there existed, beyond the reach of experience and nature, a transcendent realm where perfect goodness, beauty, truth, and justice resided. Although he saw no point to believing in a supernatural God–in fact, for him such a conception was harmful because it drafted energy away from the work needed to modify existent conditions in direction of ideal goods–he did not totally abandon the idea of God:

> We are in the presence neither of ideals completely embodied in existence nor yet of ideals that are mere rootless ideals, fantasies, utopias. For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals. They are further unified by the action that gives them coherence and solidity. It is this *active* relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name "God." (Dewey, 1934/1960, pp. 50-51)

Dewey was adamant: The ideal and the actual were not unified in some preexisting transcendent realm, nor were they unified through some automatic process. The act of unifying them–of striving to bring actual conditions closer to the ideal–fell to the human part of nature. If humans did not regulate their conjoint activities in this way, if they did not allow "God"–the active relation between the ideal and the actual–to dwell in and among them, then the unification attempt would stall. This is very close to the paradoxical injunction given 2,000 years ago to the new Christians at Philippi: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Barker, 2002, p. 1846).

Dewey's God is not the omnipotent Being who rules in sovereign majesty. Quite

the contrary, this divinity is completely dependent on human consent and action. However, even here, we must be careful not to hypostatize Dewey's very rudimentary concept of God. Besides tentatively assigning this name to the active relation between the ideal and the actual (an optional assignment at that), Dewey has no theology that can be compared to Weil's–except for one major point: Inasmuch as it operates as an impersonal grace in the world of human experience, Weil's God is likewise dependent on human consent. Apart from that, there seems to be no common ground between Weil's supernatural grace and Dewey's natural piety.

If the above analysis is correct–that Dewey defies being labeled in Weil's terms as an idealist or a materialist–then how would Dewey interpret her conclusion to this section? Weil (1955/1958) writes:

> They alone can escape these errors [of idealism and materialism] who have recourse to the incomprehensible notion that there is a unity between necessity and the good, in other words, between reality and the good, outside this world. These last also believe that something of this unity communicates itself to those who direct towards it their attention and their desire – a notion still more incomprehensible, but verified experimentally. (p. 160)

If Kestenbaum's (2002) reading of Dewey has any merit, then Dewey might respond: [62] "Yes, I have escaped the errors of idealism and materialism as you define

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[62] This imaginary response is based on Dewey's own words as highlighted by Kestenbaum (2002, p. 230). The first paragraph draws on *Human Nature and Conduct* (Dewey,1922, pp. 264, 259). The second paragraph borrows from *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Dewey, 1920/1948, p. 211), *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1929a, p. 292), and "The *Iliad*: Poem of Might" (Weil, 1940/1977c).

them, and I do hold on to the notion that blind force and moral traits are somehow unified in an enveloping whole, the sense of which sustains me in the midst of our feeble attempts to bring the actual closer to the ideal. However, Ms Weil, I take your phrase 'outside this world' to mean a place beyond what is immediately open to observation and inspection. It may be beyond my senses, or 'supersensible' as Mr. Kestenbaum calls it–it outruns the seen and the touched [63]–but I cannot say that it is beyond nature or 'supernatural'; to do so would be to say more than I know and am willing to assert."

"Let me add, however," Dewey might continue, "that I know what you mean when you talk about the grace experienced in true friendship. There *is* something spontaneously miraculous and mystical in certain phases of shared life and experience which bathes even the ugliest scenes of the modern world with a beautiful light which, as Wordsworth puts it, 'never was on land or sea.' Great poetry also can shed this kind of light, even on the bitterness of war, as your commentary on the *Iliad* points out. However, that is about as far as I will go in the direction of what you confidently assert, and I confidently reject, as the 'supernatural.'"

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[63] If one assumes that Dewey's notion of experience is empirically defined–that experience is exclusively based on what comes to us through the five senses–then one might conclude that Dewey is unwittingly driving a wedge between experience and nature, that something can be beyond experience yet not beyond nature. This is not the case, since his definition of experience is wide and deep enough to embrace the aesthetic, the religious, and even the mystical (Dewey, 1934/1960, pp. 35-37).

Weil, on the other hand, puts the transcendent beyond nature but not beyond experience. By definition, the supernatural is not subject to the conditions of existence. Therefore, it cannot exist in any conceivable way to minds that are subject to those conditions. Even so, Weil was convinced that her experience of the supernatural was not an imaginary one. Her conviction was partly based on the fact that prior to this first "absolutely unexpected contact" (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 36) she had no interest in tackling the problem of God or in reading the mystics.

"Professor Dewey," Weil might reply, "you are probably right not to go any further in that direction. The object of my search is not the supernatural, but this world. The supernatural is the light. We must not presume to make an object of it, or else we degrade it.[64] I take your rejection to be a justifiable critique of its degraded forms. Reading your arguments in *A Common Faith* can serve as a purification to those who have formed illegitimate attachments to what they erroneously take to be the supernatural."

Summary

For Dewey, wisdom was connected to nature through the moral striving of human nature. It came into existence as humans modified actual conditions towards ideal ends, which themselves were suggested by natural situations previously experienced. The wisdom of human action took into account the generic traits of nature (stability and contingency) to which it was always subject even as it sought to manipulate these traits in creating a better life for all.

For Weil, wisdom was connected to nature in a double relation. Nature was subject to a divine wisdom even as human wisdom was subject to nature. Human modification of actual conditions was not a one-way street: Both human actions which changed natural environments and human joys and sufferings given or inflicted by nature were tempered and enlightened by a divine love–a wise persuasion–which was communicated to those who ardently desired it and who were willing to wait patiently and attentively for it.

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[64] The preceding three sentences are her exact words (Weil, 1952-1955/1956, p. 173).

In this chapter we have compared the views of John Dewey and Simone Weil on wisdom. Our comparison was structured around three questions: How is wisdom connected to experience from a psychological perspective? How is wisdom connected to the social dimension of experience? How is wisdom connected to nature? We found much agreement between Dewey and Weil, particularly in the way each of them located the source of wisdom in work that combined thinking with acting–an endeavour that could modify existent conditions, which in turn would rebound on an individual to fashion a moral self and rebound on a society to create a genuine community. For both, wisdom took into account connections that bound an individual to others. Although both of them believed that intellectual and manual labour should be united in conjoint activity and shared work experiences, Weil emphasized that physical work should form the spiritual core of a society. Although both valued shared experience, Weil was more wary of the social forces which shaped thought, since clear thinking could be achieved only by individuals. Finally, Weil not only believed that nature was subject to a divine wisdom, but that a democratic society would thrive only if it was watered by supernatural springs. Dewey could not see how one could move outside nature or experience and believed that any attempt to so would stunt the growth of wisdom. Wisdom could be nourished only by natural rivers–even if some of those streams were given a divine designation.

In the next chapter we will continue our comparison of John Dewey and Simone Weil as we examine how one can educate for, and be educated by, a love of wisdom.

CHAPTER FIVE: EDUCATING FOR A LOVE OF WISDOM

How does one educate for a love of wisdom? How can a comparison of John Dewey and Simone Weil help educators who share or desire to share in this love? How can it help them to communicate and cultivate this love with their students? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions by looking at a first-hand account of the original University of Chicago Laboratory School–*The Dewey School* (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936)–in conjunction with the second edition of *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Dewey, 1933). The former serves as a concrete illustration of how to educate for a Deweyan love of wisdom; the latter, as its subtitle suggests, provides a coherent theoretical statement of what Dewey meant by thinking and how to educate for it. The latter will also serve to bring into focus Weil's views on thinking, especially since she gave so much value to clear thoughts and the method for conceiving them–developing one's capacity for attention.

The Dewey School and *How We Think* are intrinsically connected. In *How We Think*, Dewey (1933) provides specific pedagogical advice on the teaching of thinking which is rooted in what he learned with the laboratory school. In my opinion, these two books (when read together) not only provide the best illustration of what Dewey meant by cultivating a love of wisdom with schoolchildren, but they also most clearly delineate what amounts to the same thing–his educational philosophy. Dewey's more famous treatises–*Democracy and Education* (1916/1966) and *Experience and Education* (1938/1963)–are better understood after one has read *The Dewey School* (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936) in which concrete practices are described by the very teachers who had been "on the ground" with these children. In contrast, *The School and Society*

(1899/1990) and *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902/1990) leave many specific questions unanswered, even though of all Dewey's publications, they are most directly tied to the Laboratory School. In a more recent review of that experiment, Laurel Tanner (1997) asserts that the achievements of the Dewey school have yet to be truly appreciated and assimilated in American schooling, and she whets the appetite of those readers who want to know more. As Tanner notes, "it is indeed a paradox that Dewey, whose emphasis was ever on human progress through shared experience, left so little of his own experience in a form that would be truly useful to future generations of school improvers" (p. 10). With Dewey's support, Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards (1936) left us a document that fills in many of the blanks and connects most of dots.[65]

But where does this leave Weil? How can her relatively undeveloped educational views be fairly compared to a fleshed-out educational theory informed by a bold experiment in educational practice? We shall use Weil as a foil in our attempt to uncover and critique Dewey's views on how to educate for a love of wisdom. She brings to the table her own experience as an educator with working-class adults and as a teacher with highschool adolescents. Like a fellow practitioner who can function as a critic in appraising the work of a more celebrated artist, the former *lycée* professor of philosophy will offer her insights on the Deweyan project as mediated through my understanding of

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[65] In my view, Dewey's mature philosophy as articulated in his later writings is very coherent with his work in the laboratory school. His naturalistic metaphysics (1929a) and aesthetics (1934/1979) are strongly rooted in that experience. In his look back at the theory behind the school from the vantage point of writing his later works, Dewey (1936) did not repudiate or even substantially modify the ideas of education that he first published in 1895.

both of them. If the analysis presented in the previous chapter has any merit, then her credentials are well founded: Weil's views on wisdom dovetail quite well with Dewey's, and she is able to hold her own on the points where they diverge.[66]

After briefly reviewing the 8-year history of the Dewey school, we shall focus our analysis by attempting to answer two main questions: (a) How does one educate for love of wisdom, taking into account its connection to experience? (b) How does one educate for love of wisdom, taking into account its connection to thinking?

History of the Dewey School

When John Dewey came to the University of Chicago in 1894 to head the Departments of Philosophy and Psychology, he had a strong desire to test his developing ideas on education. In a letter to his wife Alice that same year, he shared the outlines of a laboratory school forming in his mind "where some actual and literal constructive activity shall be the centre and source of the whole thing. " (Dewey cited in Westbrook, 1991, p. 96). With the support of President William Harper, Dewey convinced the university authorities to adopt the following plan. The University School would operate under the auspices of the newly created Department of Pedagogy, with Dewey acting both as chair of the department and director of the school. Graduate students in this department would be available to assist those who were hired to teach in the school. Finances came from three sources: the university, which transferred money received as tuition paid by the

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[66] I refer the reader to the previous chapter where I analyze and compare their respective positions. A reader with a strong naturalist bent may disagree with me, since she has not proved the existence of a realm beyond nature. Be that as it may, I believe such a reader might be willing to concede that Weil has laid out incisive and provocative arguments that are worth considering.

graduate students in the Department of Pedagogy; the parents of the schoolchildren, who paid a relatively modest tuition directly to the school; and donations from community supporters, who responded to fundraising efforts which covered the annual budget shortfalls (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 12). The pupils came mainly from middle-class families, many of which included parents who taught at the university.

In the initial plan, Dewey (1895/1972) stated that the problem for all education was "to co-ordinate the psychological and social factors" which meant that "the child be capable of expressing *himself*, but in such a way as to realize *social* ends" (p. 224). The school's curriculum was guided by the following hypothesis: Integrating the need for expression with ends defined in association with others would best be achieved through such basic occupations such as cooking, sewing, and carpentry. On the psychological side, this decision was based on Dewey's understanding of human development and learning. Thinking and feeling were not only inextricably connected to motor activity, they originated there. The direction to motor activity was furnished by interest–the activity had to appeal to the child as "worth while, as genuine work" (p. 228). Cooking, sewing, and carpentry represented adult activities which young children observed at home, and these occupations were often reenacted by them in dramatic play. These constructive activities would form a bridge that connected the child's preschool experiences to the adult's life as a productive participant in the wider society. On the social side, these occupations connected the child to the most fundamental physical problems: developing the means to procure food, clothing, and shelter. By engaging in these activities in association with her peers, the child would both understand the material

basis of her own society and strengthen the social bonds formed in conjoint activity.

The basics of traditional education–reading, writing, and arithmetic–would not be imposed as separate subjects to be taught in isolation but be brought in gradually as students saw the need and use for developing these skills in relation to their productive work. For example, carpentry, cooking, and sewing all demanded the use of numbers in measuring, and since the purpose of language was primarily social–"the child does not realize an activity save as it feels that it is directed towards others and calls forth a response from others" (Dewey, 1895/1972, p. 226)–written communication would eventually develop out of oral exchanges. Drill exercises in writing and reading would be employed only after a student appreciated how written communication could better serve the purposes that she had formed in the process of constructive activity. The other disciplines could be found in embryonic form within the activities, and Dewey listed them in his plan for the benefit of the teacher, whose task it was to connect the child with these disciplines inasmuch as they were connected to and grew out of productive work. For example, when the child boiled an egg, the teacher could point out the states of matter involved in heating water (physics) along with changes undergone by the egg (chemistry). In woodworking, the structure of trees would be studied (botany). While spinning and weaving her own woolen fibres, an older student would try to understand how the development of steam-powered looms destroyed the cottage-based manufacturing of earlier times (history).

As Mayhew and Edwards (1936) point out, learning-from-mistakes took place almost immediately: "The first six months was a 'trial-and-error' period and was chiefly

indicative of what not to do" (pp. 7-8). Sixteen students between the ages of 6 and 9 were led by one teacher assisted by one graduate student (Dewey, 1897/1976, p. 325). What went wrong? Dewey had assumed (as most of us still do today) that the all-round elementary classroom teacher would be in the best position to oversee the integration of subjects around occupations, especially at the primary level. Scientific inquiry was arguably the most important discipline for Dewey, and it soon became clear that a child's introduction to it through activity had to be guided by someone with a solid background in that subject (Mayhew & Edwards, pp. 35-36; Tanner, 1997, pp. 98-99). It was morally irresponsible to knowingly allow the weed of mis-education to take root at the beginning and then hope that it would be pulled out later: It was not only wasteful for the school; it was harmful to the child. If this were true of one discipline, then it was true of every discipline. Children should be exposed to the best available ideas from the very beginning. Dewey (1897/1976) reasoned that it was impossible for one teacher "to be competent in all directions. Even if it were desirable it is a physical and mental impossibility" (p. 334).[67] Second, the more a teacher had mastered a subject and felt

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[67] As Tanner (1997, p. 99) laments, the myth of the generalist teacher has yet to be challenged in North American schooling. The distaste for mathematics and the incidence of math phobia among young people and adults must have some connection to the fact that many young children are guided into this discipline by teachers who have not specialized in it, or worse, have no taste for math themselves. Until I had read about Dewey's about-face regarding the generalist teacher, I had never seriously questioned this myth. I accept his reasoning with the following qualification: Sometimes a specialist so takes her knowledge for granted that she cannot understand the difficulties her students are experiencing in comprehending the subject matter. In some cases, a teacher who is only a few steps ahead of her students in grasping material is in a better position to see the difficulties, provided that she is enthusiastic about her own learning and seeks to understand the discipline to the best of her ability.

"thoroughly at home in it, using it unconsciously without the need of express thought" (Dewey, 1933, p. 275), the more her conscious attention could be directed at how the students themselves were dealing with the subject matter.

Despite the objections of many parents, the idea of the all-round teacher was abandoned, and the school was reorganized the following October along departmental lines–one full-time teacher in charge of science, cooking, and related "domestic arts," one in literature and history, one in manual training and shop work, and a part-time teacher in music (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 8).[68] To prevent specialists from creating what the child would experience as separate compartments (as often happens in rotary teaching), weekly meetings were held in which teachers listened to each other's reports and collaboratively strove to maintain an integrated and holistic curriculum which was developed and refashioned "on the go." As Wirth (1966) has noted, "It was an early form of team-teaching" (p. 141).

During the first 2 years, the experimental nature of the school was more pronounced: A number of approaches and materials were attempted–some kept and some discarded–in developing a curriculum which had no precedent to follow. For example, tracing the path of primitive peoples in solving the problems of food, clothing, and shelter was deemed successful for children as young as 7. However, the development of Roman civilization seemed too remote and abstract to properly engage the interests of 10-year-

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[68] The teacher who had been the all-round generalist became the specialist in charge of literature and history in the new departmental organization. Her graduate assistant became the teacher in charge of manual training and shop work. The new teacher of science and domestic arts was Katherine Camp, who would later coauthor *The Dewey School* (Dewey, 1897/1976, p. 325).

olds (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 49). Although there were opportunities for multiage grouping in relation to certain activities, the teachers found that grouping the students according to age seemed to work best. In 1898, a "subprimary" department was added (ages 4 and 5). To avoid confusing the Dewey school with the public school's graded system, the age groups were simply labeled as Group I (age 4), Group II (age 5), Group III (age 6), and so on up to Group X (age 13) and Group XI (ages 14 and 15).

Certain features considered to be an essential part of schooling (even today) did not exist here. Homework was initiated by students, not by teachers. Assessment of student work was based on anecdotal evidence and was used to determine a student's readiness to engage in a certain type of activity or was used to modify the curriculum. Review of work at the end of a daily session took the place of testing, and neither grades nor marks were used to measure student performance. As in life outside of school, ideas were tested in action through construction and experimentation. Only the oldest group (age 15) encountered the demands of scholastic testing as conventionally understood, but this had nothing to do with the Dewey school per se; courses and tutors were offered to help this group prepare for college entrance examinations. No doubt, Simone Weil would approve of this; she was also reluctant to assign marks or grades to her students, much to the chagrin of her administrators. However, unlike the Dewey schoolteachers who were concerned that their graduates be prepared for the next level of schooling, she was not particularly interested in preparing her students for the *baccalaureate* or *bachot*–the French equivalent of college entrance examinations (Pétrement, 1973/1976, pp. 170, 181).

As enrollment increased, the school outgrew its facilities, moving three times in 5 years. By October 1898, it included a gymnasium; multiple rooms for manual training or shop work, art and textiles, history and English; one large kitchen, two dining rooms, two science laboratories, and enough outdoor space to plant a garden. In 1902, the school had what would turn out to be its largest population, while maintaining a very low student-teacher ratio (6 to 1): 140 students, 23 teachers, and 10 assistants (graduate students). Less than 2 years later, the experiment ended with Dewey resigning and leaving to take up a new position at Columbia in New York.

What had happened? In 1902, the University of Chicago planned to incorporate the Chicago Institute, a teacher-training school run by a pioneer in progressive education, Colonel Francis W. Parker. Along with it came an elementary school whose primary aim–to provide a site in which student-teachers could practise their skills in Parker's pedagogy–ran somewhat at cross purposes to Dewey's laboratory school, which was not in the business of training teachers. According to Mayhew and Edwards (1936), both schools shared a progressivist vision, but they "differed rather widely in theory, method, and practice" (p. 13). As the Chicago Institute was heavily endowed by a private donor, the university would allow the Dewey school to operate as a separate institution on condition that it raise $5,000 annually on its own. Although some parents were able to raise this large amount in short order (roughly equivalent to raising $100,000 today–an indicator of how successful the Dewey school was in the eyes of its supporters) and were given leave to operate the school under the same administration for another year, the

pressure to amalgamate with the Chicago Institute increased.[69] Through the ensuing negotiations, Dewey was able to secure a solid footing for his laboratory school, believing that the school's teaching and administrative staff would remain under his direction. Unknown to him at the time, as Mayhew and Edwards (1936) discreetly phrased it, "assurances had been given to the Trustees of the Chicago Institute that certain members of the administrative staff of the elementary school would be eliminated at the close of the first year after the merger" (p. 17). To put it bluntly: Alice Dewey, the principal of the laboratory school, would be fired. According to Westbrook (1991), President Harper had made this concession in view of the fact that the faculty associated with the former Chicago Institute had threatened to resign en masse if Alice Dewey remained as principal. They opposed her "because she had been an outspoken critic of the Parker school and was not shy about firing teachers she considered to be incompetent" (p. 112). When John Dewey became aware of this in the spring of 1904, he resigned. Without his direction and protection, the ideas embodied in the Dewey school soon disappeared within the different culture of the Chicago Institute.

Educating for Love of Wisdom in Its Connection to Experience

Why didn't the University of Chicago give the Dewey school more financial support? Was the laboratory school not enough of a success in the eyes of the president

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[69] Mayhew and Edwards (1936) suggest that this increased pressure to amalgamate had something to do with Colonel Parker's death in 1903 (p. 14). In reading Westbrook's (1991, p. 112) account, one gets the impression that Parker's death provided Dewey and his supporters with an opportunity to take charge of the merger. Did the renewed pressure to amalgamate originate with Dewey, who was understandably weary of constantly seeking funds to keep his lab school afloat?

and trustees of the university? What if circumstances had been different and the Dewey school had established itself for a long run under the auspices of the University of Chicago? It is beyond the scope of this study to speculate on these questions. Instead, using Mayhew and Edwards (1936) as our main source,[70] we will draw on the historical record to determine what the Dewey school can teach us about educating for a love of wisdom, taking into account its connection to experience. In other words, we will consider how the love of wisdom can be cultivated in the transaction between an individual and her environment. Although the social dimension of experience is inextricably linked to this, it will remain largely in the background as we look at this transaction from a psychological perspective. The journey taken with Dewey and Weil in the previous chapters will be retaken, but this time we will see how wisdom, or the love of wisdom, might be cultivated in this transaction, using the Dewey school as a source of concrete examples.

Both Dewey and Weil agreed that wisdom was rooted in a certain kind of transaction with the environment, an action intelligently directed towards the environment in such a way that it rebounded back on the individual in ways that strengthened it from a moral point of view (Dewey). On the rebound, this activity could unify powerful

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[70] Using one main source is risky if one is seeking an impartial assessment of a social experiment. Mayhew and Edwards taught in the school and were strongly committed to the ideas which undergirded it. The astute reader recognizes a strong bias for the school, which is unavoidable and understandable: True believers tend to de-emphasize the types of failures that a more independent observer may point out. The lab school sounds too good to be true. I have tried to circumvent this problem by treating *The Dewey School* as an extension of Dewey's thought. Since he contributed a number of sections to the book and guided its entire development (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. vii), I believe that such an approach is warranted.

emotions and clear thoughts, resulting in a truer perception (Weil). This indirect action–activity diverted from immediate outlet through inward deliberation towards a measured, mediated expression–was work.

Unlike play in the strict sense of the term–where activity was enjoyed without regard to where it might lead–work involved setting up ends-in-view and determining what means or series of steps would result in consequences which most closely approximated desired ends. Nevertheless, enjoyment was an essential part of work so conceived. Work was play transformed into something more intelligent. At the mercy of whim or circumstance in "pure" play, a casual interest could become an absorbing interest that moved a person to peer into where an activity might lead–the genesis of work. If play and work did not interpenetrate through this transformation of interest, if they were isolated from each other, then play would degenerate into "fooling around" and work would become drudgery (Dewey, 1933, pp. 212-213, 285). If play and work were seamlessly connected, then the person would probably be in what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls "flow"or optimal experience: "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4).

How could play and work interpenetrate? First of all, there was "play" in the flexible relationship between means and ends. Means determined ends as much as ends determined means. Continuously along the sequence of steps employed as means, ends were clarified, modified, or even discarded as the consequences of actions became increasingly visible in deliberation. Second, a person employed in this kind of work experienced a sense of freedom in direct proportion to the amount of responsibility she

had in planning and executing the work. This is what Weil sought to achieve in making factory work more of a joy and less of a monotonous burden. Rather than having bodies performing actions on behalf of other minds (as was the case in most factories), or having younger minds receiving the prefabricated thoughts of older minds distilled through teachers or textbooks and developing skills without reference to purposes that the students themselves formed (as was the case in most schools), Dewey and Weil sought to strengthen the connection between thinking and acting in every working person.

The Dewey school provided an opportunity to try this out. Hence, Dewey placed work and occupations at the centre of the curriculum. This is all well and good, but how were young children to be initiated into an "adult" activity without unduly suppressing their spontaneous impulses as was done in the traditional school? When Dewey (1899/1990) wrote that experience was "the mother of discipline" (p. 17), was he advocating that children be forced back to work on farms, in mines, and in factories in contravention of the child labor laws? Of course not. And yet, having a share in real work outside of school–being responsible for household tasks or farm chores–had been more educative for Dewey in his own childhood than the recitation of school lessons (Tanner, 1997, p. 13). Similarly, despite being the product of an elite school system, Weil was irresistibly drawn to the labor of the farmer, the fisher, the miner, and the factory worker whom, she believed, had all wisdom within their grasp (Weil, 1987, p. 85).

In one sense, Dewey attempted to retrieve in his school the vital and implicit connection between living and learning that generations had experienced for thousands of

years when most children had been gradually initiated into adult society through on-the-job manual training. Industrialization and compulsory mass schooling had weakened that connection. For hundreds of years, European society had taken on-the-job manual training for granted and had believed that learning-through-books was educationally more liberating, even though it was not available to all. As the invention of the printing press made books cheaper to produce, as the Protestant reformers advocated that each Christian should be able to read the Bible for herself, as the feudal social structure was challenged by cries for equality of opportunity from a growing middle class, and as industrialization eventually removed children from an early apprenticeship, educational reformers strove to make learning-through-books available to everyone. The common school took this model and refashioned it according to the new principle of mass production. This was achieved by avoiding a costly variable in traditional education–a low student-to-teacher ratio. Only the rich could afford to pay tutors in learning-through-books, but a working apprentice had also benefited from one-on-one instruction, whether from a master craftsman or from a laboring parent. Even though Dewey was not interested in turning back the clock of history, he was willing to accept the necessity of a low student-to-teacher ratio for a different model of schooling. The problem of education had to be rearticulated in a way which addressed the changing times: How could the practical arts (on-the-job training) be related to the theoretical arts (learning-through-books) in ways that strengthened the connections between living, learning, doing, making, and thinking? In a school which attempted to answer that question with all seriousness, the liberal arts might regain their soul, since, as Weil (1955/1958) maintained, true freedom was defined

by a certain relationship between thinking and acting (p. 85). Dewey's tentative answer formed the guiding hypothesis for his school. Occupations would be at the core of his curriculum, since Dewey was convinced that

> the best results follow when such a process reproduces on the child's plane the typical doings and occupations of the larger, maturer society into which he is finally to go forth; and it is only through such productive and creative use that valuable knowledge is secured and clinched. (Dewey cited in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 40)

Rather than discounting the spontaneous impulses exhibited by a young child and prejudging them as a potential impediment for instruction, Dewey accepted Rousseau's thesis that a child's natural inclinations were the foundation stones of education. Rather than seeking to extinguish them and replace them with a structure built by another mind that was deemed superior from an adult perspective, Dewey aimed to build an educative environment in which the child gradually gained power over her native impulses as they were tempered, reconstructed, and expressed through the discipline of productive work, co-operative activity, and communal discussion. This demanded a low student-to-teacher ratio, because teachers had to understand how the native impulses operated in each student so that these impulses could best be directed and harnessed in activities that were experienced as educative. For example, a number of boys in Group IX (age 12) were not interested in the historical approach that seemed to work well with most of their peers. Rather than labeling these students as troublemakers and adopting punitive measures, Mayhew and Edwards (1936) report that "these boys were finally taken out of the class

and allowed to follow their own diverse and individual lines until the general trend of their interests could be determined" (p. 214). Once their interests were uncovered (shop work construction of various early scientific instruments), the curriculum for this group was modified to reflect more of a scientific and less of an historical approach.

How did Dewey identify native impulses? He grouped them in four broad interdependent categories–two primary and two derivative. These impulses were defined in such a way that one could already see how the arts and the sciences would proceed from them. The primary impulses were closely connected: (a) the impulse *to construct* was impelled by a child's desire to control her sensorimotor activity in relation to her environment; (b) the impulse *to communicate* was social by definition (e.g., a child's eagerness to share her experiences with a caregiver or a playmate). It was closely associated with the impulse to construct in that the ability to manipulate abstract symbols was dependent on having habituated the ability to manipulate concrete things. Although the impulses to construct and to communicate are primary and interdependent, I have intentionally placed the impulse to construct first, where Mayhew and Edwards (1936, pp. 40-41) have placed it second. One could argue it either way from a developmental perspective: On the one hand, learning to speak follows learning to acquire significant control over sensorimotor mechanisms; on the other hand, an infant's first cries are given social significance almost immediately. In giving primacy to the constructive impulse, I am reflecting the Dewey school's emphasis on productive activity as the medium through which the social impulse was expressed. Learning how to write and read followed the oral discussions that attended the framing of problems and the testing of solutions in

occupational work.

The impulses to construct and to communicate were combined in each of the remaining two broad categories: (c) the impulse *to inquire*, investigate, and experiment was at the core of scientific work in which language served as a cognitive tool to extract meaning (What will happen if I *do* this?); and (d) the impulse *to express* was at the core of aesthetic work in which meaning was constructed and imparted through artifacts. The Dewey school can be seen as an attempt to use the constructive impulse to repair the breach that had separated the industrial arts from the fine arts and art from science. As the art of inquiry par excellence, science was a handmaiden to art understood in the fullest and finest sense– the possession, expression, and enjoyment of meaning (Dewey, 1929a, p. 290).

How were native impulses to be reshaped and reconstituted in education conceived along occupational lines? Occupations like cooking, sewing, and carpentry functioned to integrate these native impulses and to give them a direction and purpose that both engaged a child's present interests and opened up avenues to, and laid the foundations for, a child's growing ability to extract meaning from the artifacts of knowledge deposited by her surrounding society in both the academic disciplines and the practical trades. It was wise to put occupations at the centre because it helped educators avoid the extremes of opposing educational paradigms. Without the directing and restraining influence of occupations, progressive education was liable to indulge native impulses in ways that dissipated them in the intensity of immediate outlet. By focusing inordinately on the child, the progressive teacher inadvertently blocked her access to the

treasures deposited by society in the adult curriculum. In contrast, by force-feeding society's deposit of knowledge in bite-size pieces, the traditional teacher inadvertently weakened the child's ability to think for herself. By viewing the child as a *tabula rasa*, the narrow empiricism of traditional schooling threatened to denature a child's native impulses. Without the problem-posing impetus and discipline furnished by occupations, a child would find it difficult to order her own thinking in ways that promoted intellectual growth–she was either at the mercy of uncontrolled native impulses, or she was at the mercy of a logical scheme which someone else had constructed and which threatened to stifle her native impulse of inquiry. In both cases, the child could only develop a sense of meaning and a vital connection to the world *in spite of* her schooling. From an educational perspective, therefore, occupation and work promised to cultivate the love of wisdom in a threefold fashion: (a) it avoided the extremes of progressive and traditional education; (b) it integrated the child with the curriculum in deeper and more meaningful ways, moving gradually from the psychological (in which the logic of a student's native impulses and interests were reconstructed through the discipline of work) to the logical (in which the logic of the academic disciplines reconstructed the student's experience of work); and (c) as we have seen in Chapter Four, it was the root of wisdom on its own account.

Before we investigate to what extent the Dewey school was successful in cultivating a love for wisdom, let us allow Weil to make a comment or two. Would she approve of a school that attempted to combine thought with action by co-ordinating mind and hand through occupations with a manual emphasis? As we have hinted so far in this

chapter and especially in the light of the analysis in previous chapters, it seems clear that she would have been an enthusiastic supporter of the Dewey school. In a letter to a former student who had wanted to quit school in order to experience real life by exploring as many sensations as possible, Weil (1935/1965b) cautioned her with ideas that seemed to have been lifted straight from Dewey:

> For the reality of life is not sensation but activity–I mean activity both in thought and action. People who live by sensations are parasites, both materially and morally, in relation to those who work and create . . . . And the latter, who do not seek sensations, experience in fact much livelier, profounder, less artificial and truer ones than those who seek them. (p. 12)

Although Weil encouraged her to stick with a traditional school, she advised her former pupil to take an interest towards schoolwork by combining it with a critical attitude of resistance: "Examine the [physics] textbook and the lectures to see how much false reasoning you'll find. While playing this extremely instructive game, the lesson often fixes itself in your mind without your noticing" (p. 13). However, the conclusion to the letter leaves no doubt in my mind that Weil would have embraced the idea behind the Deweyan experiment, as she lamented the deficiencies of her own education:

> I have learnt in the factory how paralysing and humiliating it is to lack vigour, dexterity, sureness of eye. And in those respects, unfortunately for me, one can never make up for what one didn't acquire before the age of 20. I cannot too strongly recommend you to exercise your muscles, your hands, your eyes, as much as possible. For the lack of such exercise one feels singularly deficient. (p. 14)

As if in response to Weil, the head of the carpentry shop in the Dewey school claimed that manual training was most effective between the ages of 4 and 14: "Girls profit just as much as boys from this training in the early grades and are often as expert and more painstaking." (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 262). Would Weil not agree with Dewey (1897/1976), who gave the following reason for centering his school around manual training? "The use of the hand, and other motor organs in connection with the eye, is the great instrument through which children most easily and naturally gain experience, and come in contact with familiar materials and processes of ordinary life" (p. 326).

Wisdom was connected to experience through the training of eye and hand. By keeping the body *in* mind, education was less likely to isolate body *from* mind. In citing Descartes, Weil (1987) was convinced that wisdom–often hidden from those who considered themselves to be intellectuals–was more likely to be found with those engaged in physical labor since they "judge things close at hand much more soundly and clearly than those who have been in constant attendance at schools" (p. 85). Dewey (1933) made a strikingly similar observation:

> Because their knowledge has been achieved in connection with the needs of specific situations, men of little book-learning are often able to put to effective use every ounce of knowledge they possess; while men of vast erudition are often swamped by the mere bulk of their learning, because memory, rather than thinking, has been operative in obtaining it. (p. 64)

Wisdom was using knowledge or information in grappling with specific, concrete problems. As much as possible, Dewey wished to avoid the trap of traditional schooling

in which "amassing information always tends to escape from the ideal of wisdom or good judgment" (p. 64). Of course, memory and information played a critical role in education–even rote learning could be useful and helpful–but not as an end in itself, but in its function as providing, as Weil might put it, matter on which the mind could bite, as an occasion for thinking.

Wisdom and Manual Training

Dewey did not want manual training in his school to be aimed primarily at creating skilled carpenters, gourmet chefs, or expert tailors. Of course, graduates of his school could have chosen those paths, but the school's curriculum was not designed to provide a series of preplanned lessons to attain a particular trade as quickly as possible. In manual training as Dewey conceived it, a student worked with raw materials and fashioned them with tools into objects that she had herself designed. The finished product usually served a purpose in another area of the curriculum. For example, the children made their own jute board pencil boxes (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 44), dumbbell racks and bean bags for the gymnasium, lead weights (shaped and smelted by the children themselves from ore) and test tube racks for the laboratory (Dewey, 1897/1976, p. 326). In cooking, the groups took turns preparing food for the whole school weekly luncheon. When Group IV (age 7) traced the development of primitive tribes they experimented with fashioning pottery from clay through a long series of trial-and-error activities that culminated with their invention of a crude potter's wheel which they constructed themselves and subsequently used to make various clay utensils (Mayhew & Edwards, p. 105). The following description of Group IV's work in textiles

captures the Dewey school's approach to connecting hand, eye, and mind:

> Raw wool was given to the children to examine and decide how the fibres could be made into yarn. When they had pointed out the crinkles which would hold the fibres together, they spun wool with their fingers and wound it on a stone. The weighted thread twisted round their fingers, and this, coupled with what they had observed about spinning, led one or two of them to suggest something that would spin like a top. They then were shown pictures of a spindle, a spindle whorl, and so on. Thus the primitive way of spinning and its gradual development became clear to them as they reconstructed and gradually improved the primitive tools. (Mayhew & Edwards, p. 109)

Group X (age 13) had formed clubs to pursue "extracurricular" interests (debating, photography) but soon discovered that few rooms were available for them in which to meet. To solve this problem, they planned, built, and furnished their own club house through the guidance of the teachers and the assistance of the younger groups, who were more than eager to help. As Mayhew & Edwards enthused: "This enterprise was the most thoroughly considered one ever undertaken in the school. Because of its purpose, . . . it drew together many groups and ages and performed a distinctly ethical and social service" (p. 232).

Wisdom and Social Occupations

Social occupations provided the conceptual framework within which manual training was given a purpose and a direction connected to a child's interest. At the subprimary level (Groups I and II, ages 4 and 5), occupations were connected to the

child's preschool experiences at home–household occupations. As in many kindergartens today, these groups operated on their own, with little interaction with the rest of the school. The morning began with hand-work, followed by songs and stories, marching and games, a midmorning luncheon in which the children were in charge of setting up, serving each other, and cleaning up afterwards, and a final period of dramatic play. This routine was often changed to accommodate outdoor walks or class trips (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936).

The teachers encouraged the children to talk about their household experiences, and from these conversations the children came up with ideas that they acted out in dramatic play or expressed through hand-work. Hand-work included drawing, painting, modeling in clay, working in sand, playing with blocks, and actual construction with wood, tin, leather, or yarn. For example, the 5-year-olds were able to measure with rulers and cut their own lengths with handsaws in building scrub boards which were used in the dramatic play of washing and ironing laundry (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 66).

Group III (age 6) moved beyond the home and explored occupations which served the household, such as agriculture and lumbering. They constructed miniature farms on a sand table and planted winter wheat in an outdoor garden. They threshed their own wheat and ground their own grain into flour with instruments they designed and made themselves. For example, in solving the problem of threshing, they invented their version of the flail–two sticks, one twice as long as the other, joined by a leather strap (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 82).

Wisdom and Social History

For Groups IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII, (ages 7 through 11), the study of social occupations as they had developed in the past provided the overall imaginative framework and furnished the specific, concrete problems for manual training. For each student, it provided a chronological thread which bound the educational experiences of one year onto the next. For those unfamiliar with the Dewey school, it may come as a surprise to see history given a major role in such a progressive and experimental institution. The school's curriculum provided a concrete answer to the question that Dewey posed 35 years later: "How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 23).

Why did the Dewey school go to the past? Why did it not continue to journey in the present along the path begun in the subprimary department, beginning with household occupations and moving on to the wider society? Contemporary society was too complex for a direct approach. More promising was an indirect route, a detour through the past, when associated living was arguably easier to comprehend. By reenacting social occupations that served the household through the drama of play and constructive activity, the 7-year-old child was ready to investigate their origins as problems to be solved.[71] Dewey saw that the best way for a child to understand the wider society into

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[71] While not pointing out its educational value directly, Weil (1941/1968a) had a similar insight: "Work developed out of play and by imitation of play, an imitation whose trace is perhaps seen, more clearly than among us in the habits of certain populations called primitive" (p. 39).

which he would eventually venture forth was to imaginatively reconstruct that society along its own history. This was not to be accomplished by feeding the child facts about inventions and discoveries, but by posing the problems of survival to a child as if she were living alongside her forebears. Facts about inventions and discoveries *were* brought in, but in a way that tried not to spoil a child's appetite for discovery and invention or weaken her ability to think through a problem on her own.[72] No doubt aware of his former teacher's (G. Stanley Hall) dictum that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, Dewey nevertheless advocated the genetic approach more as an educational tool than as a psychological postulate (Wirth, 1966, pp. 111-112). Dewey (1936) was very clear on this: "In reality, there was no adoption of the notion that the experience of the growing human being reproduces the stages of the evolution of humanity" (p. 472).

Between the ages of 7 and 11, the students encountered history, but not in a strictly chronological fashion. Periods and cultures in history were selected to the extent to which they were "emotionally and intellectually intimate parts of a child's concern and outlook" (Dewey, 1936, p. 471). Group IV (age 7) encountered the problems of procuring food, clothing, and shelter from the perspective of primitive tribes. The benefits and dangers attending such concrete activity were striking. For example, because he had been taught how to put out a fire, one 8-year-old boy saved his brother from a

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[72] In my attempt to get upper elementary students to appreciate how Canadian Aboriginals solved these problems in the past, we would read *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (1987)–a story about a 13-year-old boy who survives a plane crash in the Canadian wilderness. Hooked by Paulsen's gripping narrative, my students were in a better position to imaginatively encounter the problems of survival. The Dewey school went much further–the child's constructive work attempted to solve these problems concretely.

severe burning at home. By contrast, because one teacher had not given clear directions about where a fire should be built, a child went home to start one in a closet (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 99)! Group V (age 8) followed the maritime commerce and exploration of the ancient Phoenicians in order to understand how measuring, bartering, and keeping records of transactions solved the problems associated with trading and led to the development of numerals and alphabets. A child who could see those connections, who was interested in playing the part of a miller not just for its own sake but was interested in the how and why of her activity, who was willing to defer ends through the working out of means, was judged to be ready for the drill and practice of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Working through the problems of sailing and navigation, the children moved from the Phoenicians on to the European explorers of the 15th century. Group VI (age 9) followed this up with the origins of the United States, starting with the history and geography of Chicago, then going back to the first settlements at Virginia and Plymouth. Group VII (age 10) traced the history of the American colonies up to the Revolution. Group VIII (age 11) went back to an intensive study of English village life from medieval times to the beginning of the industrial revolution in order to better understand the European background of the American colonists and to aid in the study of English literature.

For Groups IX (age 12), X (age 13), and XI (ages 14 and 15), history became less of a thread in unifying students around group work. Having become more adept in thinking abstractly and more confident in her own ability to solve problems, each student was more likely to follow an individual interest than to join up with others in a common

pursuit (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, pp. 204-205). The building of the clubhouse was a notable exception. History receded in the background and took its place alongside the other subjects in a curriculum that began to look more and more like a collection of academic disciplines, except that, from the students' perspective, these disciplines were rooted in holistic experiences furnished through the practical discipline of occupational work and manual training.

The other disciplines found their place in the give-and-take among students guided by teachers who kept the specialized subjects constantly in view without arbitrarily separating them from each other or from constructive activity. Science had a prominent place, since the impulse to inquire naturally grew out of the impulse to construct. For example, the study of chemistry, botany, zoology, and human physiology developed out of activities associated with cooking as students explored the sources for food and their effect on the human body. The study of physical matter–wood and fabrics–developed out of carpentry and sewing. Since art was closely connected to useful construction, the "finer" versions of art products were not as prominent as they might have been if the school had specialized in the arts as conventionally understood. Dewey made no apology for this. It was more important to keep the useful and fine arts in close association and so develop within the child an aesthetic appreciation that attended all her activities. He refused to separate them, even if this separation could produce visible art works which might be judged more successful from an adult perspective. In the Dewey school, artistic successes may have been comparatively rare as judged by outside critics, but Dewey believed that they went deeper and left "a more transforming, because more

completely integrated, impress" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, pp. 361-362).

Weil (1949/1952b) would most likely applaud Dewey's decision to go to the past, since in her words, "we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us" (p. 51). No doubt, Weil would teach history in such a way that school children would not unconsciously assume an attitude of superiority towards the past. The Dewey school's curriculum might have engendered this bias because certain periods of history were consciously chosen for study according to their usefulness in helping the children grasp the propelling dynamic in technological development. For example, the Phoenicians were chosen over North American Aboriginals because the latter societies were judged to be too "static" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, pp. 118-119). To say that Weil would not use the idea of progress as a guiding principle for curriculum development was an understatement: "The dogma of progress brings dishonour upon goodness by turning it into a question of fashion" (p. 230).[73] Yet, by using history as an imaginative backdrop in facing parallel problems of survival that elicited from the children a constructive experimentation, an attitude of admiration for their forebears was more than likely to develop. Dewey's insistence that children work with problems from the bottom up would probably counteract the

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[73] Dewey would probably agree with Weil's critique of progress-as-fashion. Dewey's understanding of progress was linked to his idea of growth, by which he meant the continual reconstruction of experience in a way that opened up wider and deeper avenues for subsequent reconstruction. If that is not kept in mind, a contemporary reader could easily equate his idea of growth with the kind of enlargement we see in economic development (e.g., the growth of Walmart), or in the attempts of a political ruler to expand his powers (e.g., Chavez in Venezuela, Mugabe in Zimbabwe), or in the attempts of an aesthete to savor as many experiences as possible (Walsh, 1993, p. 108).

progressivist bias underlying his curriculum. Perhaps the imaginative reconstruction of history in association with the direct experience of working with the rawest materials available was an approach that Weil (1949/1952b) would not necessarily reject: "No other method exists for acquiring knowledge about the human heart than the study of history coupled with experience of life, in such a way that the two throw light upon each other" (p. 232).

Nevertheless, Weil (1955/1958) would endorse the genetic method in helping each individual child develop an understanding of her own civilization–an understanding that she identified as a criterion for a free society (p. 20). As we saw in Chapter Three, she had used the genetic method successfully in teaching the history of mathematics at the secondary level and had recommended that science be taught the same way in conjunction with experimentation and the acquisition of a productive technical skill (Weil, 1932/1968b)–ideas which find an echo in the Dewey school's emphasis on manual training. Furthermore, Weil (1987) would insist (and Dewey would agree) that science be taught "in such a way that each student, following the same order he would follow if he were methodically making discoveries himself, may be said less to receive instruction than to teach himself" (pp. 85-86). In her view, the only hope for a free and democratic society would be with those who had been able to unite within themselves the intellectual and manual dimensions of work (Weil, 1955/1958, p. 23). Is this not what the Dewey school attempted to achieve?

Educating for Love of Wisdom in Its Connection to Thinking

So far, we have emphasized the manual dimension of work or how wisdom could

best be cultivated by keeping concrete experience and constructive activity in the foreground. Putting the connection to experience in the background (but still keeping it in view), we now turn to the intellectual dimension of work–the process of thinking–and how to cultivate wisdom with respect to it.

Like Weil, Dewey (1933) identified genuine freedom with the intellectual dimension of work. This freedom was dependent on cultivating a capacity that each human possessed–the power to think. This power did not just grow by itself; it needed to be exercised and made over into a habit. At the core of the metahabit of wisdom, the habit of reflective activity was developed by training the ability "to 'turn things over,' to look at matters deliberately, to judge whether the amount and kind of evidence requisite for decision is at hand, and if not, to tell where and how to seek such evidence" (p. 90).

For Dewey (1933), primary or "raw" experience was a necessary antecedent to secondary or "refined" experience. The meanings of these terms were relative to each other. This meant that students had to experience things directly through manual training or constructive activity as much as possible before they experienced them indirectly through book-learning. In fact, it was difficult for a child to comprehend what she was reading unless it had some prior connection to her own direct experience. Secondary or "refined" experience was more than simply the vicarious experience that reading could provide: it was the product of thinking. Thinking, or reflective activity, occurred when an obstacle impeded the flow of primary experience and caused it to fall back on itself like a wave crashing against a rocky cliff. Whether this obstacle was experienced as a practical difficulty in one's day-to-day affairs or was experienced as a theoretical challenge to

understand another person's idea, thinking did not begin until a problem was faced. Reflective activity, or what Dewey called "complete thinking," followed a certain sequence: (a) being aware of a disruption; (b) defining a problem as clearly as possible; (c) deliberating on various courses of action to solve the problem; (d) testing the solution through action; and (e) if the solution failed the test, returning to step 3 or step 2; or if the solution succeeded, then one enjoyed the fruits of one's labor. In the final step, the disruption to experience had been eliminated, but the experience itself had been modified or refined as a result of thinking. It had been enriched with a deeper and wider meaning.

Strictly speaking, the first and final steps of the thinking sequence outlined above did not involve thinking per se as Dewey defined it. They were emotional states that were felt or had. They were the relatively "passive phases" of experience (Weil's term) or the stage of "undergoing" (Dewey's term) when something was suffered or enjoyed through the conduit which connected the individual to the environment.[74] Thinking was the relatively active phase whereby the individual attempted to gain some control over the conditions which produced pain or pleasure, anxiety or serenity. In the primary phase, one became aware of a discomfort, a disruption which broke through the unconscious flow of experience and upset the equilibrium of routine activity and stabilized habit. Even though thinking had yet to be employed, it provided the needed stimulus for thought.

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[74] There was still activity going on but it was the act of receiving something from the environment, or it was the act of information processing (this often happens when we sleep), or it was an activity that occurred in an established habit and therefore did not demand conscious reflection. In thinking, activity was much more conscious of itself.

Stimulating Thought

Educating for complete thinking meant providing many opportunities for direct experience with "raw" materials in such a way that a student received a stimulus to think and an opportunity to try out a solution through activity: How can I clean up this oily wool? How can I separate the fibres out to spin thread? Can I design a tool that will help me spin thread more efficiently? To use Piaget's language, thinking had its roots in an infant's sensorimotor activity and was developed through operations with concrete things. Operating with abstract forms and symbols depended on this prior development. Dewey (1933) anticipated Piaget: "Only when thinking is constantly employed in using the senses and muscles for the guidance and application of observations and movements is the way prepared for the subsequent higher types of thinking" (p. 88).

In traditional schools, the stimulus to think was often lacking. With the artificial stimulus of marks and grades, students were more likely to memorize premade patterns of symbols (so-called thoughts) and recall them for paper-and-pencil tests without necessarily understanding how the symbols functioned in connection to the things they symbolized. For both Dewey and Weil, understanding could be achieved only by thinking through problems for oneself, especially if the solution to the problem had immediate practical consequences. For example, a number of boys in the Dewey school kept making the error of putting the decimal in the wrong place when calculating the cost of lumber. This mistake disappeared soon after the students were given the responsibility of purchasing the lumber themselves (Dewey, 1933, p. 100). Even today, how often do we find elementary students trained to follow recipes or formulas in solving so-called

problems? In one grade 4 class that I observed, the students were given a series of math questions that reviewed different problem-solving strategies. The students were lost and upset because the teacher would not tell them which strategy to use with which problem: "Do I add, subtract, multiply, or divide?" Problems for them meant manipulating numbers according to certain patterns. Had they never been given the stimulus to think through a problem for themselves? Had they not been led to visualize the concrete situation to which the words and numbers referred? For them, it was a school exercise, not a real problem. It had no meaning which connected it to their experience; it was part of that strange and esoteric world called math.

The stimulus to think had to be connected to a student's interest, and this interest originated in a student's prior experience. The teacher's task was to determine what that interest was, to find out how it was connected to her prior experience, and to provide an environment whereby that interest would be engaged in an activity that led somewhere. This was why the youngest students in the Dewey school began with household occupations. As this activity proceeded, the student would inevitably encounter an obstacle or a problem. It had to be a problem primarily for her, not one manufactured on her behalf by some artificial device imposed from outside her vital experience. For Dewey (1933), thinking could not be induced by contrived "problems" which ignored a student's interest:

> General appeals to a child (or to a grown up) to think, irrespective of the existence in his own experience of some difficulty that troubles him and disturbs his equilibrium, are as futile as advice to lift himself by his boot-straps. (p. 15)

In the history of the Dewey school, building the clubhouse was the finest expression of this educational philosophy. From the traditionalist perspective, this would be seen as an "extracurricular" affair–a lovely pastime or hobby that one could explore as long as the core curriculum was covered. From the perspective of the Dewey students, this was a vital and core activity. It proceeded from interests that they were pursuing in various self-initiated clubs until they bumped up against an obstacle–they lacked the facilities to meet. Once the problem was defined, the students asked for permission from their teachers to build their own clubhouse. Instead of running up against resistance from school authorities ("We do not have time for this. We cannot afford to pay for materials."), they received encouragement, support, advice, and guidance. It became a symbol of conjoint constructive activity intelligently pursued on behalf of interests genuinely held in common. According to anecdotal evidence provided by Mayhew and Edwards (1936), graduates of this school had certainly developed the ability to think for themselves. The following is typical of reports received from graduates and parents of graduates:

> A mother who had been most critical as to the effects of the school on two of her children acknowledged many years later that, when comparing the two children who had had the school experience with those who had not, she believed "the markedly greater ability of the first two to meet new situations and to attack problems was due to their early experience in this school." (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 403)

Defining a Problem

Once a student was stimulated to think, she would pay attention to what caused

the disruption. In Weil's terms, this action detached a part of herself from powerful emotions that, in mild cases, tempted her to express a whining helplessness, and in extreme cases, induced a panic reaction. At least some of the energy bound up in these emotions had to be released and made available for thinking–and this was achieved by looking at the conditions which determined the disruption–defining the problem. The more attention was paid to the problem, the more energy was diverted from immediate emotional outlets towards delineating the problem and deliberating on various courses of action.

A wise teacher would know how to encourage those whining grade 4 students who did not know how to tackle a math problem. She would not give in to the temptation to tell them, no matter how much they complained. Perhaps she would have them discuss various approaches in small groups. How many times has it occurred that when a teacher has asked a student simply to read the problem out loud, the student began to see the solution before finishing the reading? As Dewey (1933) phrased it: "A question well put is half answered" (p. 108). Nevertheless, most mathematics textbooks provide predefined problems. Students are not defining them, they are simply reading them. In the Dewey school, perplexing situations were more indeterminate. Students had to do the heavy lifting of defining problems themselves.

Ideally, a child who had been stimulated to think through a problem for herself took ownership of that problem almost unconsciously. Usually, when one felt conscious of taking ownership, this awareness was related to an initial unwillingness to tackle it. It felt more like an imposition rather than an interest which stimulated thinking. As Weil

(1950/1959) maintained: "The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work. The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy" (p. 71). The unselfconscious ownership of the problem propelled her thinking–it mattered to her! Of course, this is not to deny that from time to time one must consciously force oneself to face a problem and cross the threshold of imposition in order to make the problem one's own. The temptation to evade a problem is usually stronger with someone who has not been trained to think. The Dewey school aimed to provide that training from an early age–to make it an ingrained habit that would become a lifelong source of strength and joy in the midst of uncertainty and danger. It was the muscle fibre of character.

The problem and its corresponding solution in relationship to the child had to be experienced as original, even if this meant that she was reinventing the wheel. In the Dewey school, originality was defined by its relation to the child, not by its relation to the deposit of knowledge left by adults or by other children. This was also the best way for the child to assimilate the treasures of the past. Just as Weil took her own journey of doubt to understand the deposit left by Descartes, so each child in the Dewey school had to take her own intellectual journey following interests that mattered to her, and sooner or later, she would understand the same things that others had understood before her, but without feeling discouraged that someone had been there first. She would be less likely to suffer from the mass wised-up-ness and the ennui that afflicted those who had "been there, done that." Her feeling of wonder would have been preserved because she had sincerely worked at problems that mattered to her. Yet, because the journey had been

uniquely hers–and who of us has exactly the same psychological make-up–she would likely have seen a detail that others had missed, or discovered a side trail that everyone else had ignored. In either case, she would have contributed her own treasure to the social deposit of knowledge. And, Weil might add, even if what she hoped to contribute was already there, she would be more likely to rejoice that others had made the same discovery rather than feel disappointed that someone else had "beaten her to the punch." Somehow, in her intellectual journey she had picked up the virtue of humility. How so? As a product of the Dewey school, she had not been trained to compete with others for top honors or grades; she had discovered from an early age that the joy of learning was its own reward and that the experience of constructive activity in collaboration with others had led her to taste friendship–the greatest of human joys.

The accumulated experience of solving problems for herself not only developed a growing confidence in her ability to attack new problems; it strengthened her capacity to make sound judgments, an essential feature of reflective thinking and wisdom. Judging involved knowing how to select the relevant facts of a situation and how to assess their importance with respect to each other and with respect to the problem at hand. There were no fixed rules or easy formulae that could be transmitted from a person with sound judgment to one who had little experience in exercising it. One could only improve judgment through practice, using the accumulated deposit left by first-hand experience, not fearing the inevitable mistakes but seeing errors as opportunities for learning. The ideas presented in course work were understood and loaded with significance only when used by a student-teacher in handling the problems of planning for instruction with real

students. There were no academic shortcuts to developing good judgment gained through on-the-job training. When a teacher-educator who was motivated by a desire to alleviate the anxiety of student-teachers on the verge of their first practicum, explained an instructional technique to those who were hungry for rules-of-thumb and tired of educational theory, the student-teachers would often misapply it because they had little or no deposit of experience by which to understand how the technique worked in a specific situation. For example, I once told a group not to begin a lesson until they had everyone's attention. One student-teacher applied this so dogmatically with her primary students that much class time was wasted waiting for each student to be absolutely quiet. This understandably exacerbated her problems with classroom management. No doubt thinking of what he had tried to accomplish in his laboratory school, Dewey (1933) lauded the acquisition of sound judgment gained through an education which stimulated students to practise it:

> A man of sound judgment in any set of affairs is an *educated* man as respects those affairs, whatever his schooling or academic standing. And if our schools turn out their pupils in that attitude of mind which is conducive to good judgment in any department of affairs in which the students are placed, they have done more than if they sent out their pupils possessed *merely* of vast stores of information or high degrees of skill in specialized branches. (p. 120)

And sound judgment is synonymous with wisdom.

Testing Ideas

In the ideal classroom of the Dewey school, once a problem was defined, various

solutions were tried out or tested in three ways that could be used in the following sequence: (a) deliberating over the elements of the problem and rehearsing various courses of action; (b) communicating or sharing a tentative hypothesis with the aim of receiving constructive criticism from others, and finally (c) testing the hypothesis in some practical activity. Each step in this sequence supported and strengthened the others. Receiving constructive criticism not only enhanced thinking, it opened up a natural space for the cultivation of humility and democracy.

In Chapter Two we explored Dewey's concept of deliberation and how it worked to forestall immediate impulse by imaginatively rehearsing various links in the chain of cause-and-effect in order to uncover consequences that would otherwise remain hidden from view. For this to take place in a school, there had to be opportunities to concentrate without distraction. Periods of quiet, individual work had to alternate with periods of social interaction and overt activity. Dewey (1933) compared reasoning to digestion in this regard:

> A silent, uninterrupted working-over of considerations by comparing and weighing alternative suggestions is indispensable for the development of coherent and compact conclusions. Reasoning is no more akin to disputing or arguing or to the abrupt seizing and dropping of suggestions than digestion is to a noisy chomping of the jaws. The teacher must permit opportunity for leisurely mental digestion. (p. 272)

Once a student felt confident about a hypothetical solution, she might share it with her classmates and teacher to allow it to be critiqued or modified.

The process of collaborative deliberation was the ideal to which every democratic assembly aspired. If this communal approach to solving problems was carefully monitored by the teacher, lifelong habits would develop in which each student felt confident to make intelligent contributions and, in turn, follow and judge the contributions of others (Dewey, 1933, pp. 270-271). Genuine discussion and deliberation in a group would occur to the extent to which the contribution of every individual was welcomed by each of the others. Weil would remind us that thinking occurred best in the context of a group only when individuals did not feel inhibited by the presence of others, since it was individuals who did the thinking, not a group per se. This implied that each individual would attempt to think along with the one who presented her ideas. This presupposed a safe and inviting classroom in which everyone felt free to question. The presenter would be challenged to clarify her ideas, explain her reasoning, and justify her conclusions. This demanded an artful teacher who knew when to step in and when to step aside. As Dewey pointed out: "The practical problem of the teacher is to preserve a balance between so little showing and telling as to fail to stimulate reflection and so much as to choke thought" (p. 270). Ideally, if a solution required the consent of the group, it would be acted on only after everyone agreed. No one would be intimidated by the authority of the teacher or by the fear of ridicule by the group. There would be no "party whips or wimps." As in the manner of some Aboriginal councils, the virtue of patience would be exercised in reaching consensus. Once a decision was reached, action was taken by the group as a whole, with different tasks assigned to specific individuals, or action was taken by the individual who had modified her suggested solution as a result of

receiving valuable criticism from the others. Was there a better way to prepare future participants in a democratic society?

Thinking, Acting, and Contemplating.

For Dewey, thinking was an instrumental activity; it concerned itself with the relations between events, how one thing could lead to another, how actions implied consequences. It was stimulated by a problematic situation, a confusion that needed to be cleared up. In this sense, Dewey valued clarity as much as Weil in its function as the regulating ideal to which thinking aspired. But the achievement of clarity only partially fulfilled its aspiration: Clarity of thought had to be judged by the criterion of practice. Weil (1950/1970) would not quarrel with that. Good intentions or clear thoughts were worthless daydreams if they were not embodied and expressed in action:

> For living man here below, in this world, sensible matter – that is to say, inert matter and flesh – is like a filter or sieve; it is the universal test of what is real in thought, and this applies to the entire domain of thought without exception. Matter is our infallible judge. (p. 364)

As the Dewey school strove to make the test of practice the major tool for evaluation, it both reflected and challenged the society outside its walls to bring thought and action together in every occupation. Although surveys and questionnaires could serve a useful function, the quality of a business operation was not assessed by periodic paper-and-pencil tests of those who participated in it. The proof was in the pudding of practice–the quality of its product, the ability to keep customers and attract new ones, and the extent to which every employee had a share in the ownership, planning, and execution of the work.

Checking off the correct answers on a quiz only tested a person's ability to recognize certain patterns of symbols. It was the crucible of practice that truly tested the ideas to which those symbols pointed, ideas employed in judging the complexity of a real–not hypothetical–situation and in deciding on a course of action that would affect to a greater or lesser degree the lives of others. Rather than being burdened by piles of papers to be marked and graded, the Dewey schoolteachers were challenged to provide the material conditions whereby students could test their own ideas in the kitchen, the textile room, the carpentry shop, the science laboratory, the garden, the art studio, the music room, the library, and the construction site.

Whether or not the solution worked, whether or not the obstacle was removed, a person's experience had been reconstructed or refined. The activity of thinking had modified it, however slightly, by illuminating it with a clearer perception and coloring it with more significant meaning. Unlike Weil, Dewey said little about obstacles that could *not* be removed. He was forever hopeful that the discipline of thinking, especially the refined thinking of science, would find a way. He was wary of labeling a problem "insoluble" because it so often resulted in a fatalistic resignation that weakened the courage to persist. According to Gouinlock (2004) this is a lacuna in his system of thought because what Dewey "dismissively referred to as acts of acceptance will always have a fundamental importance in our existence" (p. 81). Although Weil appreciated the Stoics much more than Dewey, she did not lack the courage to persist. In her zeal to solve seemingly intractable problems, she recognized how struggling with a difficulty transformed the experience of the struggler, even if no visible progress had been made

towards resolving it. As we saw in Chapter Three, she gave to adolescent students a paradoxical injunction: Whether or not a solution was reached was not as important as the effort required in the attempt, an effort that had to be genuine and wholehearted in the Deweyan sense–there was no other way. Yet underneath this immediate objective lay a deeper purpose. If conducted with the fervent wish to solve a problem, despite all evidence that the labor was in vain, this effort would result in a transformation of experience that was usually not felt but *was* decisive. Unaware of its effect, the student had used her thinking to attack a problem in a way that developed a patient attention which would be efficacious in some other way. This was how Weil understood the transfer of learning. It might bear fruit in some other activity or subject unrelated to the unsolved problem; more important, it would bring the student one step closer to genuinely attending to a sufferer in her time of need; and it would bring her one step closer to perceiving the divine wisdom to which the whole universe was subject. Weil (1950/1959) used mystical language to describe this experience: "Even if our efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light which is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul" (p. 68).[75]

Since Dewey avoided writing about the divine and unequivocally rejected any

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[75] How can she know this? Is Weil using poetic hyperbole here? One can assume that this assertion is based on her own experiences, such as the one she had during adolescence when she felt mediocre in comparison to her gifted brother:

> After months of inward darkness, I suddenly had the everlasting conviction that no matter what human being, even though practically devoid of natural faculties, can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if only he longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention upon its attainment. (Weil, 1950/1959, pp. 30-31)

notion of the supernatural, he was silent about the use a student could make of experiencing the insoluble. Because it smacked of "either/or" thinking, he would not admit into his love of wisdom the idea of contradiction in the strict sense, and therefore he literally had no use for it. One gets the impression with Dewey that if a problem were insoluble it was not really a problem worth thinking about because one could not *do* anything with it–the fault probably lay with the fallacious reasoning which defined it as such. As Weil had done with the problem of God for most of her life, it was best to leave it alone. Nevertheless, Dewey was at home in the pragmatic spirit of modern science in a way that Weil was not. Unlike the mathematics of ancient Greece, the modern version was impatient to move past the insoluble, to "bracket" such mysteries as π (pi) or ∞ (infinity), and push them off to the margins in its mission to solve the soluble. The ratio between the circumference of a circle and its diameter (π) is a concrete illustration of the contradiction that lies at the heart of mathematics, a contradiction pointed out by Zeno long ago: Neither discrete number nor continuous space can be defined in terms of each other.[76] Yet, number can function as a tool in measuring space, and space can help us

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[76] One example of bracketing would be the injunction not to divide by zero. When a divisor approaches zero, the quotient seems to approach infinity (∞). According to the present rules in mathematics, this is not true; it is more correct to say that dividing by zero is undefined. And this can be shown quite easily when one looks at division as the reverse of multiplication. Nevertheless, the verb, *define*, has a double meaning: In one sense, it means "to fix or mark the limits of"; in the other sense, it means "to determine the essential qualities or precise meaning of" (*Webster's*, 1967, p. 216). In the first sense, *infinity* is undefined because one cannot fix or mark the limits of an infinite number. In the second sense, it is defined because one can point to the meaning of *infinity* as "an indefinitely great number or amount" (*Webster's*, p. 432). Common sense tells us that there is an ambiguity here, because the definition in the second sense carries within it the definition of the first sense.

visualize operations with numbers. It is the instrumental value of the latter, not the insoluble contradiction of the former, to which Dewey would direct our attention and our thinking. But if we take Dewey's advice, are we not missing something of prime importance regarding wisdom and how to love it? As Weil taught her students, the history of mathematics can be seen as successive attempts to handle the contradiction between the continuous (space) and the discontinuous (number), with each age suppressing one side or the other. With the advent of quantum theory a hundred years ago, the discontinuous has vaulted back onto the scene after 4 centuries of steady development during which the reigning assumption had been continuity and extension in space (Weil, 1941/1968a). The digital computer is a powerful testimony of the extent to which the discontinuous reigns today, and the flow chart schemas of computer programming is a sophisticated reification of either/or thinking. And we are left with a duality[77] in physics for which we await a unifying theory that Einstein tried in vain to formulate.

On the other hand, the Greeks were fascinated by the insoluble. Where a modern math teacher might emphasize how the idea of a perfect triangle can be used to solve a practical problem, an ancient teacher, while maintaining all the rigor needed to apply mathematical reasoning to practical problems, would also lead a student to contemplate the meaning of what seemed like an impossible situation: How can a thing which exists

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[77] Even though string theory may accomplish a grand synthesis, no one has yet come up with an all-embracing physical theory to pull together what is happening on the macrolevel (e.g., gravitational force) with what is happening on the microlevel (e.g., strong nuclear force).

nowhere in the real world (a perfect triangle) have efficacy in solving a real world problem? It was this type of mathematical training in contemplation which provided a lover of wisdom with the credentials by which he was allowed to enter Plato's Academy. Here Plato taught the art of dialectic, the aim of which was to make legitimate use of contradiction. Weil (1955/1958) explained as follows:

> The illegitimate use [of contradiction] consists in combining incompatible assertions as if they were compatible. The legitimate use consists, when the human intelligence is faced with the necessity of accepting two incompatible truths, in recognizing them as such, and in making of them as it were the two arms of a pair of pincers, an instrument for entering indirectly into contact with the sphere of transcendent truth inaccessible to our intelligence. (p. 159)

Weil did not like Hegel's dialectic and was critical of Alain, her former teacher, when his thought seemed to take an Hegelian turn (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 414): "What is intelligible in the famous 'dialectic' is nothing more than the idea of *relation*, which can be seen much more clearly in Plato than in Hegel" (Weil,1950/1970, p. 18). She considered the attempt to seek harmony in Becoming to be "a bad union of opposites" (Weil, 1952-1955/1956, p. 616). In her view, Marx's dialectic was even worse (Weil, 1947/1952a, p. 91). If a thesis could be truly synthesized with its antithesis, then the contradiction was not real.

The legitimate use of contradiction could proceed once it became clear that the contradiction was genuine, that is, every attempt had been made to eliminate one of the terms through a rigorous process of thinking guided by the Aristotelian hypothesis of

noncontradiction–something cannot be both true and false at the same time in the same context. Once the incompatibility was clearly established and neither term could be subsumed in some fashion under the other, then the art of dialectic would end by contemplating it with a patient and fervent attention. As we saw in Chapter Four, Weil's dialectic informed her political and social theory: In the least evil society, contrary needs (liberty/obedience, hierarchy/equality) had to be balanced and held in a healthy tension.

Weil drew no hard and fast line between thinking and contemplating: Contemplation was thinking transformed by the experience of struggling with extremely difficult or impossible problems such that its effect on the attitude and action of the thinker was qualitatively different. This was not navel gazing: If contemplation kept one frozen and static, if it had no effect in the sphere of action, if it was merely a pleasurable activity to escape from difficulty, if it did not pass through the sieve of matter, if the thoughts so contemplated did not produce actions to which they corresponded or at the very least did not change the accent [78] of those actions, then the so-called thinker had not been contemplating–she had been daydreaming. For Weil (1950/1970), contradictions presented a thinker with the opportunity not to daydream but to experience the same beauty of reality that a laborer found in his work:

Beauty is the manifest appearance of reality. For reality is the obstacle, and the

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[78] "It is not surprising that a man who has bread should give a piece to someone who is starving. What is surprising is that he should be capable of doing so with so different a gesture." (Weil, 1950/1959, p. 104). Through this qualitatively different gesture, the person on the receiving end, if he was equally attentive, could sense that the giver did not look at him merely as an occasion for practising charity. In such a case, the receiver could not help but express a genuine gratitude rather than a servile or perfunctory "thank you."

> obstacle for a thinking being is contradiction. Incommensurability . . .was the first radiance of beauty manifested in mathematics. What is real in perception does not lie in the effort but in the contradiction experienced through work. (p. 387)

In addition, like thinking, contemplation was not something exclusively reserved for those who had managed to pass the entrance examinations of Plato's Academy. Like originality, the insolubility of a problem was defined in relation to the thinker. Therefore, contemplation was open to everyone. Even more than this, a person of lower intelligence would have a greater number of insoluble problems open to her and would therefore have more opportunities to contemplate.

Weil (1950/1977b) wrote that the only difference between a person considered very intelligent and one considered less so was that the former inhabited a larger prison cell. The more intelligent person could move around in her cell without bumping against the walls and therefore could entertain the illusion that she was not in prison. The less intelligent person was less likely to be deceived. A love of wisdom which embraced contemplation so defined would naturally see each human being as having equal status. It was just that those who were simple-minded had a natural advantage. If educators truly believed this, then the meaning of "special education" would be turned on its head. Using the prison metaphor, Weil described how wisdom is beyond intelligence:

> A man whose mind feels that it is captive would prefer to blind himself to the fact. But if he hates falsehood, he will not do so; and in that case he will have to suffer a lot. He will beat his head against the wall until he faints. He will come to again and look with terror at the wall, until one day he begins afresh to beat his head

> against it; and once again he will faint. And so on endlessly and without hope. One day he will wake up on the other side of the wall. Perhaps he is still in prison, although a larger one. No matter. He has found the key; he knows the secret which breaks down every wall. He has passed beyond what men call intelligence, into the beginning of wisdom. (p. 331)

Unlike Weil, Dewey (1929a) made a clear distinction between contemplating and thinking: "To contemplate is consciously to possess meanings; to behold them with relish; to view them so absorbingly as to revel in them" (p. 269). Although having a meaning was a prerequisite for taking it and using it for something else–contemplation was the holding phase, and thinking was the instrumental phase. Contemplation was an aesthetic activity more than an intellectual one. It was the time of perching in which one found rest and enjoyment, not the time of strenuous flight. For Weil, contemplation did not entail possession. As Simpson and Johnson (2002) argue, Platonic contemplation was an erōs for wisdom that did not seek to possess indubitable knowledge. It was aimed at the same object to which thinking was directed–a problem.

To use Deweyan language, Weilian contemplation was a form of attentive deliberation in which the inner channels of activity kept impulses moving around in circles, finding nothing around which they could coalesce in order to propel an overt, linear act. There was no object to which they could attach themselves. Indeed, the underlying goal resembled the Buddhist quest which sought to detach one's desire from particular objects. This was not the passive or undergoing phase of experience: It was the active form of thinking but seemingly deprived of outlet. In the centre of this swirl of

mental activity was an emptiness, a motionless void which was waiting to be filled by something outside the realm of sensation, feeling, emotion, thought, and imagination. This "something" could be the solution to the problem. After concentrating on it for a time, a person goes to bed convinced that there is no solution. In the morning, the answer "comes" to her. During the night, her brain had been sorting things out below the surface of consciousness, and perhaps she recalls dreaming about it.

But what if the answer did not come to her? Was there any use to the seemingly futile exercise of contemplation? As we have noted above, Weil believed that never was a genuine effort of attention wasted. To use Deweyan language, struggling with a problem without reaching a solution still reconstructed the experience of the struggler in ways not immediately accessible to consciousness. Her ability to think attentively had been strengthened, and therefore she was in a better position to tackle other problems. Would this be another way of expressing what Dewey meant by growth in education? But Weil does not stop there: Contemplating an insoluble problem or a genuine contradiction with an almost pure attention could put one into contact with "something" that would make the solution to the problem seem unimportant:

> The authentic and pure values – truth, beauty and goodness – in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same act, a certain application of the full attention to the object. Teaching should have no aim but to prepare, by training the attention, for possibility of such an act. All other advantages of instruction are without interest. (Weil, 1947/1952a, p. 108)

The contemplative-attentive stance could be present in all mental and overt

activity. However, if thinking eschewed contemplation, was concerned only with soluble problems, was anxious for visible achievement of ends judged to be desirable, then for Weil it was a form of thinking appropriate for practical intelligence but not for wisdom. Its attitude was no different from that of a student whose main purpose for studying hard would be to achieve good grades. Of course, thinking directed at soluble problems was perhaps a necessary prerequisite for contemplation ("We have to accomplish the possible in order to touch the impossible" [Weil, 1947/1952a, p. 112]), but it could not take one step in the direction of wisdom which Weil described as beyond intelligence, or (which amounted to the same thing) the good which Plato described as beyond being. Noncontemplative thinking could be compared to Luke's (10: 38-42) description of a distracted Martha who complained that her sister Mary was not helping with the household chores (Barker, 2002, pp. 1592-1593). An arguably superior version of this lower form can be compared to the diligent servants of a parable recorded in the same gospel (Luke 17: 7-10). Exhausted after toiling in the fields all day, they were still expected to prepare supper for their master and to serve him at his table. Yet, they did not expect to be thanked for only doing their duty. Hence, Jesus taught his disciples to regard themselves as unworthy servants (Barker, p. 1605). Doing one's duty profited nothing and did not make one "worthy," but it was a necessary condition for preparing oneself to receive the grace of patient attention. It is analogous to the farmer who ploughs the field, sows the seed, and does all he can to provide the necessary conditions for the seed to grow. He can only wait for the seed to sprout on its own.

Thinking which embraced the attentive patience of contemplation could be

compared to a Mary who listened at Jesus's feet or to the watchful servants of another parable (Luke 12: 35-40). These servants were ready for service and were waiting patiently in eager expectation for their master's arrival: "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them" (Barker, 2002, p. 1597).[79] Weil (1950/1970) constructs a bridge from the servants of the first parable to the servants of the second: "Let the slave await the master until his physical strength is totally exhausted. The waiting may take the form of some wearying activity. It is the soul that waits in immobility, which may subsist amid the greatest external agitation" (p. 177).

This is not to imply that Dewey should be classified with a distracted Martha or an unprofitable servant. It is also not to imply that Weil is advocating contemplating mysteries in the religious sense as opposed to solving them in the scientific sense. For her, contemplation or patient attention serves both functions at the same time. For Dewey, these functions are separate events. Thinking-in-order-to-define-and-solve-a-problem was distinct from contemplation-as-enjoying-the-achievements-or-the-process-of-thinking. Sometimes, in probing a mystery from a different angle, an "insoluble" problem would dissolve.[80] For example, those boys in the Dewey school were able to solve the mystery of decimal points because they were forced to use them in the context

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[79] Weil (19501959) alludes to both these parables in her essay on the right use of school studies (p. 74).

[80] The Deweyan approach to mystery was pointed out to me by John Novak (Personal communication, September 8, 2007 and April 17, 2008).

of purchasing lumber. Mysteries were seen as challenges for the systematic thinking and doing of modern science, even if, when the mystery was solved, another one loomed on the horizon. For Dewey, this invited growth and further growth within the individual–the continuous and never-ending reconstruction of experience.

Both Dewey and Weil invite the educator to join them in their quest for wisdom. Their journeys coincide to a great degree. In my view, Weil would applaud the Dewey school as far as it went, and it strongly suggests to us that a version of that experiment needs to be repeated a century later. Combining thinking with acting through productive work is an intriguing hypothesis that should be tested again. In the final chapter, we will conclude our comparison by focusing on a question that we have so far neglected: What is the nature of love in its relationship to wisdom? Finally, we will consider how the particular love of wisdom which emerged out of this comparison can inform educational research and practice.

CHAPTER SIX: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE WISDOM?

What has emerged from the comparison of John Dewey and Simone Weil on the love of wisdom? What has Weil evoked from Dewey, and what has Dewey brought to light in Weil? Weil's assertion that the source of wisdom is found in work evoked a sympathetic echo from Dewey. The Dewey school's curriculum had been centered around and integrated by occupations. Hence, his laboratory school was examined in more detail. It was a practical experiment implicitly focused on educating for wisdom through work–work that attempted to combine thinking and acting through an evolving curriculum that took a child's natural playfulness and refashioned it through the discipline of constructive activity. It aimed to keep the drudgery of work and the foolishness of play to a minimum. This view of work would hit home with Weil, who wondered throughout her life how the oppressive boredom of industrial life could be transformed into something more meaningful and joyful.[81] With one factory owner, Weil (1936/1965a) had tried the *direct* approach but failed to convince him to include more employee

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[81] One would think that things would be different 70 years later–not so, at least not in some industrial firms. One of my son's acquaintances had spent a summer working in an automobile assembly plant. Even though the pay was excellent and he would have easily covered his university expenses with money to spare, he could not stomach it. Not only was the work overwhelmingly monotonous, the drudgery had created a base culture among the regular employees which disgusted this sensitive young man. He wanted to leave before he was hardened to it and became a part of it. Weil (1942/1977a) had observed: "The dreary exhaustion from factory work leaves a gaping void that clamors to be filled. It can be filled only by rapid, violent gratifications the resulting corruption of which is contagious for all classes of society" (pp. 71-72).

But factories in the usual sense of the word are not the only workplaces that exhibit an assembly line structure. Witness the factory farm or the entertainment industry. Even an independent film maker like Robert Bresson, who pursued his art with a zeal for meticulous detail, made puppets out of his amateur actors. When asked what it felt like to act for Bresson, one of them replied that compared to his regular occupation –stone masonry–acting was mindless work (Dauman & Bresson, 1967).

participation in the planning of the work. Perhaps both employers and employees had developed rigid habits of mind that originated in the way they had been nurtured and schooled. Dewey's educational experiment attacked this social problem *indirectly*: It was designed to develop the metahabit of wisdom such that those students who eventually became employers would invite worker participation as a matter of course and would see it not as a concession to workers' demands but as a necessary part of running a good business; and those who eventually became employees would expect it as naturally as they would expect to be paid. In both cases, they would have been trained to attack problems courageously through a social collaboration that became second nature. In other words, they had been educated in the method of democracy. Similarly, Weil (1942/1977a) suggested a new type of school, the bare outlines of which correspond to the general ideas behind Dewey's experiment:

> [The school] must be conceived in an entirely new way, that it may shape men capable of understanding the total aspects of the work in which they will be taking part. Not that the level of theoretic studies must be lowered; rather, the contrary. More should be done to excite intelligence to wakefulness, but at the same time teaching must itself become more concrete. (p. 71)

Dewey's love of practical wisdom–what Garrison (1997) might call an erotic pragmatism–brought into bold relief Weil's passionate and unequivocal view of practice: Bodily action was the criterion for judging the efficacy and authenticity of spiritual values. Whatever one might think of this strange young woman, no one can dispute her efforts to keep thinking and acting in line with each other. She is an outstanding example

of what Freire (2004) would call a *coherent* teacher. As surmised in the previous chapter, Weil would wish she had gone to the Dewey school, if only to acquire manual dexterity, the lack of which she tried so hard in her adult life to overcome.

In this final chapter, a question remains unanswered that needs to be addressed: What is the nature of love in its relationship to wisdom? Finally, we will suggest certain lines of inquiry for educational research and practice.

Thinking and Acting: Ontological or Functional Distinction?

Since love is often viewed as a feeling, the relationship between thinking, acting, and feeling will be explored beginning with Dewey's concept of sympathy. Next, we will consider how one form of love–erōs–operates in the longing for wisdom. But first, we need to tie up some loose ends in our analysis of the relationship between thinking and acting, a reciprocal relationship from which wisdom emerged for both Dewey and Weil. It aims to clarify their differences in response to an old question: Is there an ontological distinction between thinking and acting?

A wise person not only thinks before she acts: she is thinking as she acts and after she acts. For Weil (1955/1958), the skilled craftsperson illustrated this unity of thought and action in a body made "fluid through habit" (p. 91). Dewey would point out that thinking, at least thinking that had educative value, was occasioned by a *disruption* of habit. A highly skilled sailor would need the challenge of navigating through a stormy sea in order to think in the Deweyan sense. However, when one achieved the desired goal –the fusion of thought and action–a new habit would be formed, and thinking in the Deweyan sense would go dormant until awakened by the next disruption. If wisdom was

good thinking embodied in coherent action, then a wise person would not wait until the next disruption arrived in experience; she would go out in search of problems (Arlin, 1990), continually rousing her thought to wakefulness, keeping constant watch through all her activities, cultivating attentiveness and mindfulness even in the most mundane and routine work (Miller, 2006). A wise teacher would not be easily satisfied with "successful" lessons, would not be easily frustrated by "unsuccessful" ones, would go out in search of "problem" students, and would welcome honest mistakes as opportunities for growth. A wise teacher would seek to impart this wisdom to her students, both unconsciously by her own example and consciously by continually reconstructing the type of learning situations described in the previous chapter.

In this dissertation, I have maintained that the concept of freedom held by both Dewey and Weil was coeval with their concept of wisdom: Both were derived from the harmonious union of thinking and acting. Unlike Weil, who saw this harmony as a bridge to a wisdom in and beyond nature, Dewey described this relationship in the language of evolutionary naturalism: Far from being ontologically distinct from action, Dewey understood thought to be an evolving form of intraorganic action increasingly and deliberately controlling its overt release. Thought was action conscious of itself. Even though intelligent action was dependent on the thoughtful appraisal of various options imaginatively rehearsed "in the mind," thought was dependent on action for its own development. Without the test of action, thoughts were liable to become groundless phantasies. From an educational perspective, this means that overt action should precede and lay the groundwork for the development of thinking. Manipulating the symbolic

tools of thought in reading and writing should follow from, and be connected to, manipulating the physical tools of action in concrete, constructive work.

Although Weil appreciated how natural selection operated through the conditions of existence, she rejected the idea that excellence could "naturally" evolve out of mediocrity–"the imperfect cannot give rise to the perfect or the less good to the better" (Weil, 1943/1962b, p. 44).[82] In her view, thought was shaped by action, but it did not essentially emerge from it. Action was needed to stimulate and test thought, and thought could be awakened by action, as Dewey had shown in the problematic situation, but it did not necessarily follow that thought was *produced* by action Hence, she made a slight but decisive ontological distinction between thinking and acting even though she acknowledged their interdependence and would accept Dewey's developmental thesis for educational purposes, at least, up to a point.

Weil (1952-1955/1956) believed that states were ontologically prior to acts: "Acts are only the automatic consequence of a state. But we are only able to represent them to ourselves in the form of acts" (p. 234). If this is true, then we cannot essentially change who we are by what we do. Therein lies a problem that Dewey would reject as unreal, since he saw the distinction between thinking and acting as functional not ontological. If we can only know ourselves through our actions but cannot change ourselves through our actions, then change for the better is impossible. Dewey would reject this pessimistic conclusion, root and branch. Of course, we cannot change our habits directly, but we *can* change them *indirectly* by projecting our actions outward, by struggling with existent

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[82] This assertion is discussed in Chapter Four, footnote 46.

conditions in problematic situations. And since the self is a bundle of habits, reconstructing a habit, albeit indirectly, effects a change in the self which, we must remember, is a series of dynamic events, not a static essence.

Is not Dewey correct? I can think of many instances in my own life and in the lives of others to show that one can change for the better through deliberate actions that modify entrenched habits of behaviour. For example, I was horribly shy as a child, and when I had to give a public speech for the first time in elementary school, I was surprised to discover that not only *could* I do it, but I could do it *well*. As a result, I became very confident speaking to large groups of people. Someone who holds Weil's position would respond that my view of myself–my self-concept–had changed, but my underlying state of being was the same. My act of speaking well–and subsequent successful performances –revealed to me that I could handle myself very well in public situations in which I had some measure of control, but my underlying shyness and social anxiety, particularly in fluid and unpredictable social gatherings, had not disappeared. On the surface, I had changed for the better: I had developed a latent ability that has served me well. Underneath, though, had I really changed? Were there not limits in my self, whether one called it a state of being or an organized series of events, that could not be changed? To use Jungian language, an introvert can compensate for shyness, developing a role than functions well in social situations, but this must be balanced with times of solitude whereby I can "recharge my batteries." Can an introvert whose energy is depleted in social gatherings become an extrovert who derives energy from socializing? Or to look at it from another angle, did not my actions reveal a state which sought to control situations

so as to lessen anxiety? And would not Dewey be willing to concede that this is my variation of the human condition which seeks to control the precarious through intelligent action in existent conditions?

For the sake of argument, let us grant Weil her assumption: If my actions follow automatically without exception from my state of being, then my actions cannot change my state. How can my state of being be changed so that the actions which flow from it reveal that change? As Weil (1987) hinted in her student dissertation, the fact that she is conscious of the lack of power over herself not only implies an ontological distinction between thought and action, it offers a glimmer of hope. This echoes the traditional Christian position which begins with a call to contemplate this miserable condition, a misery that is easy to ignore when things go well, as Weil (1956) asserts: "Human misery is not created by the extreme affliction that falls upon some human beings; it is only revealed by it" (p. 262). Contemplation of my miserable state–which for Weil is "the only source of supernatural felicity" (p. 232)–involves examining every act "from the point of view not of the object, but of the impulse" (p. 230). This self-appraisal (which is careful not to fall into the trap of introspection) initiates an attentive, patient, incessant desire for a redemptive grace that lies beyond my control. It is a faith expressed in negative form:

> To believe that nothing of what we are able to grasp is God . . . . that our power to grasp is not the criterion of reality, but on the contrary is deceptive. To believe, finally, that what lies beyond our grasp appears nevertheless–hidden. (p. 220)

As noted in the previous chapter, Weil would give the Dewey school's program a

different accent. The emphasis on solving concrete problems would remain, but the student's ability to attend to things–whether problematic or not–would be encouraged to develop in two dimensions at once: increasing the power of manipulating concrete things and abstract concepts; and, in and through the effort aimed at manipulation, increasing the ability of attending to a reality that could not be manipulated. In this type of education, the impulse to grasp would be tempered by, and enfolded within, an awe, wonder, and love for that which could not be grasped.

This was not character education conceived as an extra- or cocurricular activity. It was the heart of a school which sought to cultivate an attitude whereby certain actions would automatically follow. In this regard, Weil (1952-1955/1956) needs to be quoted again at some length:

> The poet produces beauty by fixing his attention on something real. The act of love is produced in the same way. To know that this man, who is cold and hungry, really exists as much as I do myself, and is really cold and hungry – that is enough, the rest follows of itself. The pure and authentic values – truth, beauty, and goodness – in a human being's activity are the result of one single and self-same act, a certain application of the attention at its fullest to the object. Teaching should have no other aim but to prepare, by training the attention, for the possibility of such an act. All the other advantages of instruction are without interest. (p. 449)

Notice how Weil describes the application of the attention as an "act." Is she being inconsistent? No. To repeat, the invisible reality of a "state" can be pointed to only via

the visible reality of "acts" which correspond to it. Then, is she not defining thought in Deweyan terms? Yes and no. Weil's thinking is active, but it is a radically different type of action. Deweyan thinking is an instrumental activity that envisions a chronological sequence of actions and consequences: It imagines, and aims at, making changes to existent conditions. Weil's attentive thinking is a noninstrumental, nonlinear activity in that it focuses on an object without regard to ends or means; it aims at understanding something without necessarily changing it. From this, Weil believed that certain overt actions follow which are true, beautiful, and good.

What Is the Nature of Love in Its Relationship to Wisdom?

However, Dewey's instrumental form of thinking was not simply cool calculation devoid of emotion. Thinking was connected to acting through feeling, affection, and sympathy. Thought, especially when directed towards making a moral judgment (an essential part of wisdom) "must at least be colored with feeling if it is to influence behavior . . . . Affection, from intense love to mild favor, is an ingredient in all operations of knowledge, all full apprehension of the good" (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1989, p. 269). Sympathy, that is, literally having feelings in common with others, functions to carry thought beyond self-interest: "It is sympathy which saves consideration of consequences from degenerating into mere calculation, by rendering vivid the interests of others and urging us to give them the same weight as those which touch our own honor, purse, and power." (p. 270). Dewey's concept of sympathy was robust enough that–however essential it was in coloring thoughts and providing the motive force for moral action–it

never became an isolated sentimental impulse.[83] Surprisingly, sympathy was the most effective *intellectual* tool in solving complex problems (p. 270). Through sympathy, one could imagine being in the shoes of another person–an essential starting point for understanding the interests of others in pursuing the common good. Dewey's view resonates with Ardelt's (2004) concern that the Berlin group of wisdom researchers are engaged in "cold cognition."

Nevertheless, can sympathy motivate me to stick out my neck for the common good? Will my sympathy for others and my commitment to the common good be strong enough to accept any diminution of my "honor, purse, or power"? Dewey (1934/1960) understood implicitly that a willingness to attend to the interests of others at the possible expense of one's own required an adherence to an ideal whose actualization demanded an allegiance which was *religious* in nature. And nature provided many examples of such fierce loyalty–a mother bear protecting her cubs, a son defending his father's honour, a soldier risking her life for home and country, a martyr accepting death rather than renouncing her faith. How could the energy bound up in these narrower loyalties be drafted into the service of wider ones? How could one discern when a narrower loyalty could indirectly serve a wider one? For example, British Prime Minister Chamberlain's attempt to negotiate with Hitler in 1939 was an appeal to a wider loyalty–world peace.

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[83] The following illustration demonstrates how employing sympathy in a Deweyan fashion is difficult. In one of my graduate courses, a professor tried and failed to elicit sympathy for the plight of African boy-soldiers. Rather than being inordinately callous, my fellow students were put off by an emotional appeal isolated from any attempt to rigorously uncover the political and social context in which the abduction of children occurred. Of course, such "rigor" can be used to explain away a situation and absolve oneself of any responsibility in the matter.

Yet, the wiser course of action (in hindsight) was more indirect. World peace without tyranny meant cultivating a militant Churchillian nationalism that harnessed the energies of various countries to defeat a common enemy. Nevertheless, the religious fervor of Nazism serves as a caution to any who think they are immune to the power of collective force. Plato was acutely aware of this power and defined courage as preserving "the conviction, inculcated by lawfully established education, about the sort of things which may be rightly feared" (Cornford, 1945, p. 123). If even the wisest of the Germans (Heidegger was a party member) were blinded by this fierce loyalty or lacked the courage to resist it (Bonhoeffer was a notable exception), then what hope is there in cultivating a love of wisdom which knows what to fear in an age of terrorism?

Collectivities and Communities

Following Plato, Weil believed that loving wisdom involved cultivating a courage which had a realistic fear of how social collectivities (such as political parties, organized religions, or even scientific communities) could enslave thinking. The religious symbols which served to inspire loyalty to a collectivity in the modern age–liberty, equality, democracy–were so often empty abstractions soaked in blood.[84] Even though Weil was closer to the ideological demons[85] that wrapped themselves around modern collectivities in wartime Europe, Dewey could also perceive a type of absolutism in Marxist thought and an oppressive dictatorship in the Soviet Union during a time (the 1930s) when many

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[84] Weil's (1937/1977e) discussion in "The Power of Words" foreshadows Orwell.

[85] Grant (1973) defined ideologies as "surrogate religions pretending they are philosophies" (p. 195).

American intellectuals could not or would not (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 469-476).

Both Weil and Dewey were committed to the ideal of a society made up of interlocking communities. Unlike a collectivity which was composed of individuals bound together by vague abstractions funneled through media propaganda, communities were bound by concrete, particular, face-to-face ties among individuals who could experience an unsentimental sympathy for each other. Most of us live in some mixture of the two. Nevertheless, the number of face-to-face interactions that individual human beings can experience is finite. When Dewey espoused growth as an experience that opened up ever-widening connections, did he take this limit seriously enough? If one pushes beyond that limit while maintaining some semblance of social order, it seems necessary to let go of participatory democracy (as Lippman argued)[86] and submit to the iron grip of a bureaucracy composed of experts–a "rational" social hierarchy often cloaked by certain compensatory feeling-states. Two come immediately to mind: (a) a pseudomysticism which gives an individual the intoxicating feeling that she is part of a great and very powerful social organism or (b) an escapist culture which provides relief from a cold, calculating instrumentalism and seduces the individual with various forms of entertaining distractions or mind-numbing addictions. Is it possible for democratic communities to interlock without becoming submerged and fragmented in a wider collective? It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to consider this question. It is a variation of the question that Dewey (1927/1954) could not answer: How can the public find itself in an age of globalization?

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[86] See Chapter Four, footnote 49.

The above diatribe against mass society may seem to imply that face-to-face communities automatically create places where individuals can breathe the air of love, acceptance, and freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, the modern motif of authenticity has become a cliché: In the attempt to escape an overly restrictive rural community where everyone knows each other, a person embraces the freedom of finding her true self in the anonymity offered by a large city. Or another person seeks to escape the face-to-face despair of an urban ghetto where meaning can be found only in the fraternal bonds of a street gang. And every teacher knows that her classroom community is vulnerable to the oppression of cliques and bullies.

Nevertheless, even though the problem of democracy in a mass society has not been solved, Dewey had demonstrated in his laboratory school that intentionally creating a face-to-face democratic community was possible through a certain type of educational experience. It was here that a child's social impulses could be intentionally directed towards developing an unsentimental sympathy for others, instead of being left to chance and vulnerable to the collective power of her peers. As described in the previous chapter, the social impulses were directed and nurtured through the discipline of work that connected thinking with acting.

Plato's Symposium and the Meaning of Love

If wisdom emerges from the reciprocal relationship between thought and action, then the feeling that one lacks such reciprocity can supply the motive power for seeking wisdom. Understood this way, loving wisdom means longing for something which one lacks. If this is true, then educating for a "Deweilian" love of wisdom entails cultivating

a longing in the student for the most harmonious relationship between her thinking and acting. She both longs to test her ideas in action and to make sense of the actions observed. The wise do not seek wisdom, for they already have it. By the same token, those who do not know that they lack wisdom do not long for it either. The educator's job is to maintain and increase this longing in those who already have it and to stir it up in those who do not. Plato (1942) pulls no punches: "For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want" (p. 195). Following Plato, Garrison (1997) calls this longing or desiring form of love, erōs: "Teachers desire to educate the erōs of their students to passionately desire what is truly good" (p. xiv). Obviously, Dewey and Weil consider wisdom to be "truly good."

Garrison (1997) explicates Dewey's philosophy of erōs and shows how it can operate in education. He begins with a Deweyan critique of the *Symposium* (Plato, 1942). As far as we know, the *Symposium* is the first recorded attempt to think systematically about the nature of love. Before considering how Garrison uses it to construct a Deweyan theory of love in education, this ancient dialogue will be reviewed with help from Simone Weil and others.

In its original sense, a symposium is a dinner party. The young poet Agathon has invited a number of his friends to his home to celebrate the successful performance of his first tragedy. It is decided that the after-dinner conversation should focus on love and that each person should deliver an extemporaneous speech on the topic. Six participants take turns in the following order: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryxmachus, Aristophanes, Agathon,

and Socrates. Except for the first speaker, each oration builds on, and responds to, what has gone before.

Phaedrus begins by asserting that love is the oldest of the gods. Love is a mighty god, for "love will make men dare to die for their beloved–love alone, and women as well as men" (Plato, 1942, p. 167). The next speaker, Pausanias, argues that love should not be praised indiscriminately: There are basically two kinds of love which are distinguished by their object: One is transitory, seeking satisfaction in physical appearances which are constantly in flux; the other is constant, seeking the inner beauty of another's soul. It is only those loves which are noble and constant which are worthy of praise. For example, the novelist Jane Austen portrayed this kind of love through the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price. This working-class woman spurns the vain affections of a charming, wealthy suitor even though she has no other hope of escaping her wretched poverty and her miserable family circumstances.

Taking this idea of two kinds of love, the third speaker, Eryxmachus, uses his knowledge of the physician's art to point to another love that reconciles them:

> Medicine may be regarded generally as the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body, and how to satisfy them or not; and the best physician is he who is able to separate fair love from foul, or to convert one into the other; and he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, whichever is required, and can reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends, is a skillful practitioner. (Plato, 1942, p. 175)

Notice how Eryxmachus subtly changes the ontological frame of the discussion. Where

Pausanias saw two kinds of love that seemed irreconcilable, Eryxmachus sees the possibility of harmonizing them and claims that this possibility is pursued by every artist in all branches of knowledge. This idea foreshadows the "well-tempered harmony" of the just soul described in the *Republic* (Cornford, 1945, p. 142). It is elaborated by Lewis (1960/2002), who describes four loves–affection, friendship, erōs, and charity. In Lewis's account, it is under the tutelage of supernatural charity that the three other natural loves find that for which they are fitted–their good.

Aristophanes (apparently the same person who wrote many comedies, including a satire of Socrates)[87] returns to the power of love and explains the origin of this power in the myth of androgynous beings. These amalgams of men-women had two faces, four arms, and four feet and were so powerful that they attempted to attack the gods themselves. Zeus punished them by splitting each of them into separate genders–male and female. The power of love is shown by the desire each human has of finding and embracing the other half: "Human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love" (Plato, 1942. p. 182). Is not love of wisdom characterized by an openness to the whole of a situation?

Youthful Agathon is next, and he begins by announcing his disagreement with the first speaker, Phaedrus: Love is the youngest, not the oldest of the gods. As such, he is also the tenderest and most flexible,

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[87] Weil (1951/1957) is intrigued by the fact that Plato includes Aristophanes in this dialogue: "Plato had the gravest motives for resenting him because of his cruel mockeries and injustices towards Socrates which were perhaps not without influence upon the verdict of the trial [of Socrates]" (p. 106).

> for if he were hard and without flexure he could not enfold all things, or wind his way into and out of every soul of man undiscovered. And a proof of his flexibility and symmetry of form is his grace, which is universally admitted to be in an especial manner the attribute of Love. (p. 185)

Agathon emphasizes that aspect of love which Weil embraced in Christ: "He can neither do nor suffer wrong to or from any god or any man; for he suffers not by force if he suffers; force comes not near to him, neither when he acts does he act by force" (p. 186). Finally, Agathon asserts that love is the source of all creative work and that the best art is inspired and enlightened by love. Weil (1940/1977c) completely agreed with this conclusion and believed that this love, which was totally inimical to force, inspired the author of the *Iliad*, the hero of which, ironically, is force.

Before he begins his speech, Socrates questions Agathon in his usual, relentless style–pushing Agathon to think clearly about how he is defining and using his terms. Is love not always a love of something rather than a love of nothing? Yes. Does not this mean that love desires something that he does not have, because if he had it he would be content and not desire it? Yes.

> Would you call that beautiful which wants and does not possess beauty? Certainly not. Then would you still say that love is beautiful? . . . I fear that I did not understand what I was saying . . . . Is not the good also the beautiful? Yes. Then in wanting the beautiful, love wants also the good? I cannot refute you, Socrates . . . . Say rather, beloved Agathon, that you cannot refute the truth; for Socrates is easily refuted. (Plato, 1942, p. 192)

Socrates then goes on to recount how, when he was younger, he had thought about love much like Agathon and had been subjected to a similar type of questioning by Diotima, a wise woman who became his teacher on the subject. According to Weil (1951/1957), "her sex, the circumstances and the words pertaining to initiation and mystery which she ceaselessly employs, show sufficiently that [Socrates] is talking of a priestess of the Eleusinian religion" (p. 124).

Diotima defines love not as a god but as an intermediary daimon or spirit who is neither immortal nor mortal but is a mean between divinity and humanity, wisdom, and ignorance:

> He is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and concourse of God with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar. (Plato, 1942, pp. 193-194)

The last sentence brings us up short: The wisdom of arts and handicrafts is common, inferior, crude, and coarse?! Here, both Dewey and Weil would point out a basic flaw in ancient Greek thinking: the disparagement of skilled and manual labour. As we have clearly shown, neither Dewey nor Weil shared this contempt. On the contrary, as Dewey put his hopes in the amalgam of thinking and making that he saw operating in technological development, so Weil longed to see a society whose spiritual core consisted

of physical work. Nevertheless, our civilization has inherited the Greek attitude, spurring technological innovation with the aim of eliminating labour and creating leisure.

However, a more congenial interpretation of Diotima's dire pronouncement comes to mind when teachers-as-mere-technicians are distinguished from teachers-as-wholistic-educators. Is not the wisdom associated with technical expertise often denigrated in comparison to the wisdom associated with what Wirsing (1972) has called wholistic teaching?

> In a technological society, where specialized knowledge and skill often serve as the dominant educational focal points, the world-view that is subtly promoted to the young tends increasingly to be one of a fragmented world. The student (or teacher) who beholds the world as fragmented sees as relevant only that knowledge which is applicable to the field of specialized interest. He views all else as irrelevant and unnecessary. Therefore, I am proposing that the extent of educational relevance perceived by an individual student is directly proportionate to the dimensions of his world-view. In this light, the ultimate function of a teacher – as distinguished from that of a mere technician – is the progressive enlargement of the student's world of relevancy. This aim, of course, presupposes the progressive enlargement of the teacher's own world. (p. 87)

This does not mean that technical expertise should be avoided–far from it. The teaching techniques essential for mass schooling–classroom management, instructional planning, outcome assessment, and so on–need to be taken seriously. They should be appropriately employed and *questioned* by a love of wisdom that supersedes specialized knowledge and

skills and cultivates an openness to the whole of which these particular domains form a part. A "Deweilian" love of wisdom would question the very structure of a school system which requires such techniques as behaviour modification and standardized testing: It would ask whether a better structure could be built which encouraged the development of different teaching techniques, less dependent on artificial incentives and more meaningfully connected to the joy and discipline of intelligent work.

Let us return to the *Symposium,* where we see Diotima explaining the origin of love with another myth. Love is the child of Poverty and Plenty. Like his mother (Poverty), he is poor, homeless, and always in distress; like his father (Plenty), he is bold and resourceful, a keen hunter in pursuit of wisdom. He is in the intermediate position between having wisdom and lacking it. Like the speakers before him, Socrates in his youth had confused love of the object with the object itself–wisdom, truth, beauty, goodness (Plato, 1942).

Through further questioning, Diotima helps Socrates to see that all humans desire the good which they believe will make them happy. Whatever path they take, whatever interest they pursue, they do so in the belief that the thing pursued is worth possessing. But to truly desire the good, one must be open to the fact that the object pursued may not ultimately satisfy. The good that one seeks may be elsewhere. As Weil (1962/1974b) explains:

> We are well aware that the good which we possess at present, in the form of wealth, power, consideration, friends, the love of those we love, the well-being of those we love, and so on, is not sufficient; yet we believe that on the day when we

> get a little more we shall be satisfied. We believe this because we lie to ourselves. If we really reflect for a moment we know it is false. Or again, if we are suffering illness, poverty, or misfortune, we think we shall be satisfied on the day when it ceases. But there too, we know it is false; so soon as one has got used to not suffering one wants something else . . . . We have only to imagine all our desires satisfied; after a time we should become discontented. We should want something else and we should be miserable through not knowing what to want. (p. 75)

Once this is realized, one is in the position of having desire turned towards something that cannot be grasped–the soul consents to be oriented towards grace. "We need not ask ourselves how to have love, it is in us from birth to death, imperious as hunger. We need only to know in what direction to direct it" (Weil, 1951/1957, p. 109). In her departure from (or perhaps, her development of) what is taught in the *Symposium*, Weil (1950/1970) asserted that, unlike other desires which can be distinguished from their objects, the desire for good is itself a good:

> But whereas all other desires are sometimes effective and sometimes not, according to circumstances, this one desire is always effective. The reason is that, whereas desire for gold is not the same thing as gold, the desire for good is itself a good. (p. 316)

In other words, loving wisdom is not only an intermediary between lacking and possessing, it is both at the same time. It resembles a Buddhist koan: "This desire is not fulfilled, since it is itself the good. It is not unfulfilled, since it is itself the good" (Weil,

1950/1970, p. 317). It is analogous to Weil's (1950/1959) conception of friendship as a "supernatural harmony, a union of opposites" (p. 154).[88] By having erōs entwined with a *philia* defined as a union of opposites, a philosopher is a loving friend of wisdom.

Diotima concludes by describing how a person can be educated to desire absolute goodness, beauty, truth, and wisdom. The educator begins with the desire that a young person already possesses, in whatever direction it is aimed, because "even when it is wrongly directed it is still the potentiality of good" (Weil, 1950/1970. p. 322). Dewey viewed these desires as natural impulses that functioned as starting points and building blocks for education. The end-in-view is "birth in beauty, whether of body or soul" (Plato, 1940, p. 197). Implicit in this quest is the desire to be remembered long after one has died. In the body, this is accomplished through one's children, but this memory is short lived. The hope of "immortality" or having one's name praised for a much longer time can better be achieved through some memorable deed or work of art which is the progeny of one's soul. But educating erōs will fail if it stops there. If the student consents, the teacher helps turn her desire away from the fame that sometimes comes with creating a beautiful artifact, turning it towards beauty itself–first as seen in one particular thing, then as seen more generally in many things, until finally

> he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, . . . but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; . . . beholding beauty

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[88] See Chapter Four for Weil's conception of friendship.

> with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and immortal, if mortal man may. (p. 202, 203)

And even here, as Weil (1950/1970) maintains, "inspiration is not desired for the sake of producing beautiful things, but there is a desire to produce beautiful things because inspiration is the source of the things that are truly beautiful" (p. 308). Although Garrison (1997) in Deweyan fashion eschews the supernatural and mystical elements of the *Symposium*, he nevertheless recommends a similar path: "Determining the difference between possibilities that one immediately desires and those that are genuinely desirable is the very essence of educating erōs" (p. xvi).

As Socrates ends his speech, the symposium is interrupted by the arrival of a drunken Alcibiades. After being welcomed and offered a place at the table, Alcibiades is invited to contribute to the discussion, but instead of praising love, he praises Socrates! It seems that Plato (1942) included this eulogy to illustrate how the love of wisdom was embodied in the life of his beloved teacher. So concludes the *Symposium*.

Interpreting Plato

How should one interpret the *Symposium* regarding love and its relationship to wisdom? One way is to focus on the message of Diotima and to view the preceding speakers as clearing the ground for the climactic and final word on the subject. This seems to be Garrison's approach. It implies that the other five speakers have nothing of importance to contribute and that Plato is merely using them to enhance Socrates' oration,

which is nothing other than a recitation of what he has learned from Diotima. Garrison (1997) pulls no punches: "Ironically, Plato made his teacher Socrates passively recite lessons learned from a woman, a deliberate and sinister irony because of the oppressed status of Greek women" (p. 13). He goes on to explain how Plato was a prisoner of his sexist times. If this is true, then Plato is making fun of his teacher–Socrates is merely a mouthpiece for a woman! This makes no sense to me, especially in view of the fact that Plato could imagine the best state as being one in which no distinction was made between men and women regarding their natural gifts and competencies. With the obvious exceptions of child-bearing and breast-feeding, all occupations along with the requisite training or education were open to both genders in Plato's Republic (Cornford, 1945, pp. 144-155).[89]

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[89] Martin (1982) points out that Plato's gender inclusion is problematic, particularly when one tries to work out the practical details involved in establishing his ideal educational program: "Even if Plato does provide equal access to education and equal role opportunity for women, we cannot assume that women will therefore achieve equality of role occupancy or, if they do, that they will be accorded equal respect and receive equal treatment" (p. 295). In her view, the main problem is that women would be inculcated into an educational system that was biased toward developing masculine ways of thinking. For example, since primary education focused on stories that celebrated heroic deeds, Socrates neglected to caution his friends about "exposing children to stories which perpetuate traditional attitudes towards women" (p. 292). It is probably unfair to expect Plato to have been aware of the dynamics of gender construction as we understand it today, but if he had been, he would not have been forced to create *ex nihilo* stories about exemplary women. As Vlastos (1994) observes, "Homer and tragedy present a gallery of distinguished women who rise as high above ordinary females as do its heroic males above the mass of men" (p. 18). Weil herself was enamored by Sophocles's Antigone, and she recounted the story of this extraordinary woman in a factory newsletter, the first in a projected series of articles which were intended to acquaint workers with the best of Greek poetry (Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 263).

Furthermore, Martin's claim that Plato's educational program reinforced traits traditionally regarded as male can be disputed. For example, Brown (1994) argues that Plato attempted to subvert the masculine discourse of his day: "Those who love and are

Unlike Garrison, Weil does not make Diotima's teaching the centrepiece of her reading. In her commentary on the *Symposium* (Weil, 1951/1957, pp. 106-131), each speaker is viewed as describing a different aspect of Platonic love. Drawing parallels with ancient myths, Greek tragedy, and Christianity, Weil takes a dialectical approach in her interpretation: Love is ancient, yet refreshingly youthful–it is forever young. Love is both God and the mediator between humans and God, between nature and that which is beyond nature. Love is the great physician, healing the wounds of evil, restoring harmony in body and soul, aiding each to find its good–that for which it is best fitted–and redeeming humanity to its original unity and wholeness. Love is a fluid, graceful spirit that operates unseen, flowing in and flowing out. At the same time, it is reliable, trustworthy, and constant. Force cannot overpower love, and love does not suffer force except through consent. Love will not operate in the human soul without a part of the soul (however small) consenting to this operation. Unlike force which naturally extends its domain wherever it has the power to do so, recognizing no limit except that imposed from without, love always acts with restraint and only by consent. However, except for the part of the soul which is able to consent to love, an individual is completely vulnerable to the operation of force in all its forms–physical, psychological, or social.

Love enlightens the intellect and inspires the artist. In its desire for wisdom and beauty, love is already wise and beautiful. Expressed in the enthusiastic synergy that

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deserving of philosophy will not be regarded as real men by their Greek peers. They will abrogate the 'macho' posturing and much of the misogyny constitutive of Greek manhood, and they will be disparaged in gendered terms by their peers in doing so" (p. 173).

unites our thoughts with our actions, love of wisdom is the *philia* of philosophy. Love provides the joy which energizes our thoughts, propelling them to be expressed and tested in practice. Without it, education atrophies and learning cannot take place:

> It is not the natural capacity, the congenital gift, nor is it the effort, the will, the work, which in the intelligence has sway over the energy capable of making it fully efficacious. It is uniquely the desire, the desire for beauty. This desire, given a certain degree of intensity and of purity, is the same thing as genius. At all levels it is the same thing as attention. If this were understood, the conception of teaching would be quite other than it is. First one would realize that the intelligence functions only in joy. Intelligence is perhaps even the only one of our faculties to which joy is indispensable. The absence of joy asphyxiates it. (Weil, 1951/1957, p. 123)

Weil's (1952-1955/1956) concept of joy is at least as robust as Dewey's unsentimental sympathy, for it refuses to console itself with comforting fantasies: "Joy is the fullness of the sentiment of the real. But to suffer while preserving the sentiment of the real is better" (p. 222). Inasmuch as it created an environment where students confronted real problems–suffering through the confusion of ambiguous situations and persevering through the difficult steps of defining and solving problems–the Dewey school nourished the joy of learning and cultivated a love for wisdom.

By using the *Symposium* as his starting point for constructing a theory on how to educate for an erōs of wisdom, Garrison (1997) seems to imply a sympathy between Dewey and Plato. This is certainly not his intention. But before we look at his Deweyan

critique and supposed reconstruction of Plato, let us examine whether his notion of educational love can be harmonized with the one described by Weil above. Thus, by this indirect route we should be able to compare the views of Dewey and Weil on the meaning of love in its relationship to wisdom and education.

Garrison (1997) explicates Dewey's unsentimental sympathy and shows how it functions within an erotic education and relates it to certain feminist notions on the ethics of care. In Dewey's wholistic view of experience, thought was literally unthinkable without sensing, feeling, intuition, or emotion. Similarly, a work of art expressed a balance between integrative emotion and discriminating intellect–a balance that was sometimes difficult to achieve: "Insufficient emotion shows itself in a coldly 'correct' product. Excessive emotion obstructs the necessary elaboration and definition of parts" (Dewey, 1934/1979, p. 70). So, too, teachers are called to be artists who balance calculating intellect with sympathetic feeling, using sympathy as an intellectual tool to serve each of their students with loving attention–knowing how to "read" their students, not allowing excessive emotion to obscure clear thinking, nor allowing a cool professional stance to overrule a warm, personal concern. Like Kestenbaum (2002), Garrison (p. 56) writes of attentive love, citing Iris Murdoch, who, in turn, was indebted to Simone Weil.[90] In her description of a mother-in-law (*M*) attempting to "read" her daughter-in-law (*D*) correctly (despite *M*'s initial disapproval of *D* as a mate for her son), Murdoch (1985) illustrates not only Weil's concept of attention (which is her intention), but could just as well be describing Dewey's unsentimental sympathy or Garrison's

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[90] See Chapter One, footnote 13.

loving bestowal: "What *M* is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see *D* accurately but to see her justly or lovingly. . . . Freedom is . . . a function of the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly" (p. 23). And seeing an object or a person clearly requires loving attention.

Yet, Garrison's (1997) concept of loving bestowal goes beyond understanding a student as she now presents herself. It is that, but it also imagines what she might become:

> Teaching is a moral art that requires the greatest degree of practical wisdom. Wisdom is beyond systematic and proven knowledge of actual existing facts and truths; it is even beyond knowledge of what could possibly exist. Practical wisdom requires insight into those possible values that *ought* to exist if we are all to live the good life. Wisdom demands that we understand not only what we should call into existence, but how to do it. Finally, wisdom requires insight into what needs calling out of existence. (p. 78)

Garrison gives teachers excellent illustrations of how to make this love of wisdom concrete. For example, he uses Cynthia Voigt's *Jackeroo* to show how an encounter with good children's literature can cultivate a love for wisdom, because "deliberating on the consequences of vicarious action is a relatively safe and secure way of educating erōs" (p. 146). More concretely, it means seeing the possibility of growth in a student whom others have "written off." It is bestowing value on an 11-year-old boy, lovingly attending to what he presents, and thereby being able to perceive a certain type of intelligence when all the "scientific" evidence yielded by psychological testing indicates otherwise (pp. 178-

200).

If Garrison's loving bestowal is based on a radical reconstruction of the *Symposium*, it is difficult to see why such a reconstruction is necessary. Aside from references to the supernatural found both in the *Symposium* and in Weil's reading of it, he seems to agree with Weil's interpretation. Bringing into existence good values is a modern rendering of Diotima's "giving birth in beauty," is it not? Indeed, Garrison (1997) claims that "for Dewey, unlike for Plato, both prophecy, in the sense of Diotima's practice, and poetry, in Diotima's sense of 'calling into existence' are parts of the love of wisdom" (p. 132). But notice, unlike Weil, Garrison employs selective interpretation, for he pits the author (Plato) against one of the characters of his own dialogue. Since Diotima corrects Socrates's either/or logic and leads him to see love as an intermediary between ignorance and wisdom, being more of a "both/and" than an "either/or," Garrison does not draw the conclusion that seems obvious to me: Plato, like Socrates, has embraced Diotima's teaching. By assuming that Socrates and Plato had not transcended either/or thinking, Garrison blames Plato's legacy for modern "technocratic either/or logic" which often "can block our ability to perceive our students' present needs." (p. 5).

Garrison seems to be using the Plato partially revealed in the *Symposium* to assail the Plato portrayed by Dewey. Dewey (1920/1948, 1929a, 1929b) relentlessly attacks the idea that there exists an unchanging realm beyond nature or experience in which perfect beauty, truth, wisdom, and goodness dwell. If one has read these diatribes and Garrison's intensified interpretations of them, one is effectively inoculated against the contagion of Plato, assuming that one has not read Plato first. How could one be interested in reading

more about a "static supernaturalism" or a vision which "drowns all uniqueness and particularity" (Garrison, 1997, pp. 16, 17)? The following passage seems to put the final nail in the coffin of Plato's corpse:

> All values become homogeneous and intersubstitutable on the way to Platonic perfection. Nothing is irreplaceable. Everything differs only in quantity. Value judgment becomes simply a matter of calculation. If there are qualitative differences, they do not matter much since all values are positioned on a hierarchy that measures values along a common ruler. The values above are greater than those below. The ruler terminates in "the Good" that exists absolutely and lifelessly apart from all that suffers change. It may only be contemplated dispassionately with the detached soul of pure rationality. Philosopher kings have knowledge of this value ruler; that is why Plato believes they should rule. Few teachers view their students so dispassionately. (Garrison, p. 17)

Indeed! But if Weil's reading of Plato has any merit, then Garrison has set up a straw man that looks more like a Kantian ideal than a Platonic form. Furthermore, to say that "all values become homogeneous" is to read Plato through the eyes of modern technological science which, as Dewey (1929b) *approvingly* noted, "disregards the qualitative heterogeneity of experienced objects so as to make them all members in one comprehensive homogeneous scheme, and hence capable of translation or conversion one into another" (p. 133).[91] Grant (1982) has remarked that we moderns find it extremely

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[91] In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey (1929b) argues that since the heterogeneity of experienced objects rests upon a homogeneous scheme that can be manipulated, humans should be able to secure moral goods as they have been able to secure physical goods.

difficult to understand Plato's *Republic* "because most German and English scholars have, for the last two centuries, read it through Kantian eyes (a great darkening) and Catholics through Aristotelian eyes (better, but still a darkening)" (p. 108).[92] Were Dewey's attacks on Plato misdirected shots at Kant's noumenal realm which was inaccessible to experience? In Weil's reading of Plato, the Good is beyond being but not beyond experience and *is* accessible through a certain type of education. Later in his life, as he progressively shook off the influence of Kant and Hegel, did Dewey interpret Plato differently? How else are we to understand his own admission at the age of 70 that Plato was his favourite philosopher "whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn" (Dewey, 1932/1989b, p. 155)? However, a few years later he seemed to contradict himself: "Plato's ladder is, moreover, a one-way ascent; there is no return from the highest beauty to perceptual experience" (Dewey, 1934/1979, p. 291). As if in response to Dewey and Garrison, Murdoch (1985) writes:

> Plato seems to imply that the road towards the Good leads away from the world of particularity and detail. However, he speaks of a descending as well as an ascending dialectic and he speaks of a return to the cave . . . . This double revelation of both random detail and intuited unity is what we receive in every sphere of life if we seek for what is best. (p. 95)

For Murdoch as for Weil, Plato is closer to the Deweyan "both/and" than to the Kantian

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[92] Simpson and Johnson (2002) support my position that Garrison's erōs is very close to Plato's and that his denigration of Plato is misplaced: "Rather than being unsympathetic, unimaginative, and unresponsive to the needs of the student, the Platonic teacher must have an intimate understanding of each student." (p. 239).

"either/or."

We are far from settling the controversy on how best to read Plato, and it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt it. Nevertheless, Dewey and Weil seem to share a common conception of love. Weil is more explicit, but Garrison has uncovered Dewey's conception in a way that similarly promises to restore the love of wisdom in teaching.

Different Directions?

This leaves us with Walsh's (1993) criticism of Dewey.[93] Did Dewey hide his philosophy of love out of embarrassment? Is his desire for wisdom oriented in the same direction as Weil's? Dewey directs his love towards the existent world, the here-and-now, so he seems to "love the world" in the way that Walsh argues should form the basis of the highest values in education. Weil aims her love towards the existent world less directly–it seems to oscillate between becoming and being, between a here-and-now and a beyond, between nature and supernature. In doing this, she implicitly claims that desire so directed is able to love the existent world more truly than one aimed only at the world as naturally conceived. Yet, Dewey's gaze also oscillates between imagined possibilities and experienced actualities, between ideal aspirations which can never possibly exist in their purest forms and real existents which can be refashioned, increasing the possibility that better approximations of desired ideals may come into existence.

As Garrison (1997) points out, Dewey's love bestows value on the objects of experience. And if Walsh's (1993, p. 109) view of Dewey is correct, these objects

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[93] See Chapter One.

(whether persons or things) have no value in themselves. This seems to be an unkind characterization in the light of all we have discussed. Nevertheless, there is an ambiguity in Dewey's natural piety: On the one hand, he is willing to suppose that nature exhibits moral traits; on the other hand, all of nature is seen to be, actually or potentially, at our disposal through the methods of modern science: "It is material to act upon so as to transform it into new objects which better answer our needs" (Dewey, 1929b, p. 100). If something is seen to be completely at one's disposal, how can one love it? If love is characterized by restraint and consent, then how could it possibly operate in a technological science that acknowledges no limits in its incessant drive to reshape a nature that cannot give or withhold consent?

How can moral traits infuse nature then? Dewey's metaphysics provides the answer. Since human beings are completely at one with nature, and since they experience moral traits, then those traits must be present in nature as a whole, finding their most self-conscious expression in human action: "The intelligent activity of man is not something brought to bear upon nature from without; it is nature realizing its own potentialities in behalf of a fuller and wider issue of events" (Dewey, 1929b, pp. 214-215). By the same token, nature has no independent moral status outside of our experience or potential experience. Objects of our experience are essentially indistinguishable from our experience of them. Strictly speaking, objects *qua* objects do not exist except insofar as they function as conceptualizations which we construct in our concourse with experienced events. Outside of our experience of them, they cannot be known "in themselves." Insofar as we can manipulate these objects through instrumental reasoning,

so far do we know them. In seeking to know them, they are at our disposal, like our arms or legs. We love them because they belong to us and are useful in helping us to grow, that is, to continually reconstruct our experience of them. They have no value to us outside of our bestowing value on them, and this value is determined by how these objects best answer to what we define as our needs. As Grant (1982) pointed out, whatever our reasons may be for transforming nature into objects which better answer our needs, no matter how keenly felt or nobly expressed, "it is clear that the love involved in the modern project here is not given to or received from the objects of the research, but to other beings who will be the recipients of the goods which result" (p. 112). And since the objects of the research compose part and parcel of the existent world, Dewey is caught in a metaphysical bind: If he is aiming his love at fellow human beings apart from nonhuman nature–and this love is much to be admired and cherished especially as it works itself out in the field of education–then he has made an ontological distinction that his philosophy will not allow. If, on the other hand, he holds on to a naturalism that is inextricably bound to instrumental reasoning, then his love of human beings is provisional and will eventually disappear in a technological paradigm that allows no distinction between humans and other beings as objects of research.

If my reading of Dewey is correct, then Weil would reject his metaphysics because it assumes a natural unity between ourselves and the objects of our experience.[94]

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[94] Some would disagree with my interpretation. Boisvert (1998) claims that Dewey was a pluralist who did not assume or aspire to unity: "Dewey, admitting the irreducible nature of multiplicity, seeks *harmony*" (p. 7). Perhaps unity is too strong a term for Boisvert, but there is a sense in which unity emerges when harmony is sought. For example, when members of a soccer team act in accord with each other, when their individual actions

Although we *aspire* to this unity, we do not *have* it. In her commentary on Aristophanes's myth of androgynous beings, Weil (1951/1957) writes:

> Our vocation is unity. Our affliction is to be in a state of duality, an affliction due to an original contamination of pride and of injustice . . . . That duality which is our affliction is the division by which he who loves is other than that which is loved, he who knows other than that which is known, the material of the action other than the one who acts, it is the separation of subject and object. Unity is that state wherein the subject and the object are one single and the same thing, the state of him who knows himself and who loves himself. But only God is thus, and we cannot become thus except by assimilation into God, which the love of God accomplishes. (p. 110)

For Weil, love begins by accepting the fact of this duality. As one follower of Weil put it: "Love is consent to the fact that there is authentic otherness" (Grant, 1986, p. 38). This is the desire which is the act of attention. It both propels me towards an object of my experience (What is this? I am curious, attracted, interested.) and consents to the fact that I cannot possess it. This object is not an extension of me, no matter how tempted I may be to view it, him, or her as such. In this tension between attraction and restraint (the same one which occurs at the heart of friendship), I am opening myself up to understanding the object in a way that does not seek to interfere with it. Instead of

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harmonize so that passers and receivers are in sync with each other, then the team is more like one entity than a collection of individuals. But more important, how could Dewey (1929b) see nature as irreducibly multiple, if he accepted what physical science taught about the homogeneous structure of matter and energy? And furthermore, if his pluralism goes all the way down, why did he so often refuse to make ontological distinctions?

attempting to comprehend it (literally, to take it with me), I attempt to stand under it. Instead of interrogating it like a Baconian scientist, I am waiting patiently for it, him, or her to speak to me in its, his, or her own peculiar language when it, him, or her is ready to speak and I am ready to listen. It is the love of beauty (which illuminated much of Greek science) refusing to surrender to the love of power (which darkens much of technological science).

This love delights in the heterogeneity of experience and is not frustrated when objects or ideas do not neatly fit into conceptual categories. This love seeks a unity but does not assume it or impose it. It accepts the conditions of existence, determines with utmost scrupulousness whether force is necessary, uses force only insofar as necessary, and no further. From the arena of politics to the arena of education, wielding power with this kind of wisdom–to be able to discern when to step in and when to draw back–requires a deep love. This is Plato's philosopher-king. It is Dewey's ideal educator.

Suggestions for Further Inquiry

1. Does wisdom emerge through work understood as a harmony between thinking and acting? As far as I know, that question has not been asked, at least not in any systematic way. Although there are linkages made between thinking, feeling, and willing, in some of the definitions of wisdom reviewed in chapter one, none have pointed to work understood as intelligent activity. The Berlin and Sternberg groups come closest with their emphasis on practical thinking. If the Berlin researchers were to apply their testing instrument[95] to people who have worked most of their lives at jobs that required the

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[95] See Chapter One.

solving of concrete problems (such as skilled tradespersons) would they score higher in wisdom-related knowledge than those who have worked one or two steps removed from the world of physical labour (such as white-collar workers)?

2. Is it time to duplicate Dewey's educational experiment? If there are lessons from the Dewey school that have yet to be learned (Tanner, 1997), then they need to be appropriately reincarnated in an experiment that attempts to revisit and possibly revise the original aims of the University of Chicago Elementary School. Such an experiment would begin by carefully reading the school's archives, understanding how the original school operated on a day-to-day basis, and asking the type of questions illustrated by the following: Would sewing, carpentry, cooking, and gardening still form the backbone of the school's occupational curriculum? Given the exponential increase in technological development in the past century, to what extent should technological artifacts be incorporated in constructive activities–if at all (e.g., power tools, refrigerators, microwave ovens, computers, etc.)? Since household work has been transformed over the past hundred years through various labour-saving devices, how would the preschool children begin with occupations closest to their home experience? Would it be better to recreate the more laborious conditions of domestic life a century ago–in the interests of giving each child the same point of departure in a radically different school curriculum?

3. Could one operationalize Weil's concept of attention such that it could be tested in an educational setting? Would this involve regular times for meditation as Pascual-Leone (1990) and Miller (2006) recommend? Would the attempt to "publicly" observe and test such a "private" experience be liable to fail in a situation where the

presence of the observer may very likely change the thing observed? Perhaps not. Even a camera operator filming a class of elementary students over the course of a school year sooner or later becomes part of the background scenery (Stewart, 2005). What role should the contemplation of difficult and possibly insoluble problems play in a school's curriculum? Are these types of problems more developmentally appropriate for older students?

4. I have not explicitly raised the question of how to educate for wisdom regarding the "supersensible" or "supernatural." Nevertheless, it cannot be avoided. By positing the idea of a dialectical engagement with contradiction and by cultivating a sense of wonder that new mysteries keep emerging, a Deweilian educator would keep this an open question without necessarily denying her own beliefs on the matter. This would be handled differently in a "secular" school than in a "faith-based" school, and I am not sure what that would look like at this point, except to say that a teacher should be less anxious about acknowledging and celebrating different faith traditions in the former and more careful with the use of "God-talk" in the latter. Weil (1956) warns: "With those who have received a Christian education, the lower parts of the soul become attached to these mysteries when they have no right at all to do so" (p. 238). In other words, it is better to be an atheist than to have a false conception of God.

Dewey (1934) and Weil would no doubt agree that all of life is "religious." Nevertheless, that word raises red flags among supporters of publically funded schools. "Spiritual" seems to be a less offensive label, and Miller (2006) is an example of a teacher-educator in an ostensibly secular institution who advocates a type of spiritual

development for students and teachers in the name of wisdom and compassion.

5. How could one reconceive "special education" so that teachers genuinely believe that students who are in danger of being "left behind" (according to standard measures) are actually in a privileged position with regard to cultivating Weil's sense of wisdom? How can this be combined with a hopeful expectation (a bestowal of value in Garrison's sense) in order that so-called weaker students may display abilities that can be developed to meet standardized assessment criteria? Further, students who have trouble meeting basic literacy standards in current schooling may develop precious self-confidence earlier in a Deweilian school, where concrete problem solving and constructive activities precede the learning of reading and writing; by the same token, some students who breeze through standardized testing in the current system may encounter challenges working with their hands in a Deweilian occupational curriculum.

6. What can Dewey and Weil offer teachers who work in schools where standardized assessments seem to constrict educational options? How can a lower student-teacher ratio–so necessary in the Dewey experiment–be created within an existing system without putting a strain on budgets? How can we transform an elementary system based on the generalist teacher and the self-enclosed classroom into one where specialists work together in teams to develop a more holistic educational experience?

If the primary and junior teachers of an Ontario school (grades K through 6) wished to adopt some form of a Deweilian curriculum, they might be excused from the grade 3 standardized assessment in literacy and numeracy, since these skills would be taught in conjunction with, or follow on the heels of, concrete problem solving. Perhaps

this curriculum could be modified in such a way that the students could still meet the provincial standards by grade 6. Individual classroom teachers who do not have the opportunity to engage in such a school-wide experiment can still adopt Deweilian insights even as they feel the pressure to follow the provincial curriculum in a lock-step fashion: How can one create ambiguous situations in mathematics, science, social studies, music, visual arts, or physical education so that students are challenged to think–define a problem, consider various solutions, examine them in collaborative discussion, and test them in concrete activities? For example, in language arts, this can happen vicariously as students consider the problems faced by the protagonist in a novel study (Garrison, 1997). Finally, to what extent can student-designed practical tests replace teacher-designed assessment strategies?

7. How can teacher-education programs adopt a Deweilian approach? Since I have immersed myself in Dewey and Weil over the last few years, I can see students begin to roll their eyes when I mention either one. It is not so much talking about Dewey and Weil that is effective in my classes, but *doing* something which reflects their approach. Three examples follow: First, at the beginning of my curriculum course, students are required to write a brief, narrative account of an experience that was significant and meaningful in their lives. These accounts are then shared in small groups, and each group analyzes the accounts for commonalities as suggested by the following questions: What makes an experience significant or meaningful? To what extent is such an experience educational? What makes an experience educational? What does this mean for curriculum development and instructional planning?

Second, the subjects of the Ontario curriculum are grouped and put in the following sequence: (a) *Learning through Sensorimotor Channels*–By placing this first, I emphasize how important concrete experience is for genuine learning. Before browsing through Ontario curriculum for the Arts, Physical and Health education, I take the students outside for a short walk on campus with the instructions to look, listen, smell, and not talk. Back in class, we discuss the experience and reflect how we can incorporate sensorimotor learning in and beyond the confines of the above subjects; (b) *Learning with Words and Communicating with Grace*–Language Arts, English, and Core French are discussed in dialectical engagement with the Dewey school. Should the teaching of reading and writing be postponed? Is it wrong to teach reading in kindergarten? Should handwriting be taught anymore? How can we minimize the cut-and-paste temptation in an information age? How can class discussions and cooperative learning become truly safe and meaningful forums of learning? (c) *Learning to Detect Patterns, Define Problems, Test Solutions, and Develop Attention*–As the title suggests, Dewey and Weil are both engaged more directly as we look at the Ontario curriculum for Mathematics, Science and Technology. Here the emphasis is on discussing ways in which teacher candidates can create problematic situations and develop a scientific habit of mind in all subject areas. We also talk about striving to achieve a balance in a typical school day for concrete experience, social interaction, and quiet time.

Third, two major projects are assigned to be field tested in a practicum: (a) With a partner or two, each student designs and presents a learning centre to the class that demonstrates an attractive, interactive bulletin board, an exploration of a stimulating

topic, and a variety of tasks suitable for a defined range of students. The objective is to have the learning centre used with actual students in the first or second practicum; (b) Each student prepares a 10-lesson unit during this course in order to teach it during the first student-teaching placement. After consulting with the associate teacher, a unit plan is prepared prior to the practicum, developed and fleshed out in the process of teaching, and revised on-the-go as if it were to be taught again with the same group. The revised unit is handed in to me after the practicum.

8. One must recognize that the culture of traditional schooling may make it very difficult for a Deweilian educator. The suggestions above may take more time than the provincial curriculum allows. In addition, students may be unwilling to break out of a mindset habituated to working for marks, grades, and the teacher's approval, just as students who came from a traditional school found it difficult to adjust to the different learning environment of Dewey's school (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). Nevertheless, if an elementary school teacher can take a class of inner-city fifth graders and mold them into Shakespearean actors (Stewart, 2005), then a Deweilian educator should not be daunted by institutional and societal obstacles. After all, it is an indeterminate situation waiting to be cleared up, a problem waiting to be defined and solved.

Summary Conclusions

In this dissertation, we have studied the concept of wisdom and how to educate for a love of it by analyzing the writings of John Dewey and Simone Weil. For Dewey, wisdom was a metahabit that integrated the various dimensions of living, weaving them together in a spiral of growth–the continual reconstruction of experience. Like all habits

in Dewey's system, wisdom itself was open to ongoing reconstruction. It was an assemblage of hypotheses applied and tested in practical experience with the aim of creating a better form of life. For Weil, wisdom was the ability to make clear and sound judgments. It was available to every person regardless of their intellectual abilities insofar as the love of truth was present in each of them. Like Dewey, she saw wisdom developing more readily in practical activities–especially in physical work–than in abstract thinking divorced from concrete experience.

For both, wisdom emerged through intelligent work understood as the integration of thinking and acting. This meant that educating for a love of wisdom entailed creating a learning environment where children could work with concrete materials, trying out their own ideas, defining their own problems, and testing their own hypotheses. Educating for wisdom was aimed at healing the breach between theory and practice, science and art, fine arts and technological arts. In other words, a school designed to cultivate a Deweilian love of wisdom would address the following question: How could the practical arts (manipulating concrete objects with physical tools) be related to the theoretical arts (manipulating abstract symbols with intellectual tools) in ways that strengthened the connections between living, learning, doing, making, and thinking? If true freedom was defined by a certain relationship between thinking and acting–as both Dewey and Weil affirmed–then educating for wisdom was coeval with educating for freedom. Conceived this way, a liberal arts education would look very different from the one which goes by that tag today.

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